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THE CASQUE'S LARK

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:: OR ::

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By EUGENE SUE

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THE GALLEY SLAVE'S RING; or, *The Family Lebrenn.*

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THE CASQUE'S LARK

:: :: OR :: ::

VICTORIA, THE MOTHER OF THE CAMPS

A Tale of the Frankish Invasion of Gaul

By EUGENE SUE

TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL FRENCH
By DANIEL DE LEON

NEW YORK LABOR NEWS COMPANY. 1909

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

The first four stories of Eugene Sue's series of historic novels—*The Mysteries of the People; or, History of a Proletarian Family Across the Ages*—are properly introductory to the wondrous drama in which, as indicated in the preface to the first story of the series, "one family, the descendants of a Gallic chief named Joel, typifies the oppressed; one family, the descendants of a Frankish chief named Neroweg, typifies the oppressor; and across and adown the ages, the successive struggles between oppressors and oppressed—the history of civilization—is thus represented in a majestic allegory." That wondrous drama opens with this, the fifth of the stories—*The Casque's Lark; or, Victoria, the Mother of the Camps.*

Here, for the first time, does a descendant of Joel, the Breton chief, encounter a Neroweg, the representative of the conquering race. Here they cross swords for the first time, their descendants meeting again and again in the course of the subsequent narratives, almost always in deadly encounter, each typical of the advancing stage of civilization in which the succeeding encounters occur.

In point of time, the scene of this story is about the third century of the Christian era. The great historic epoch which it describes is that in which, the star of the Roman Empire being in the decline and the Empire's hold upon Gaul having been greatly relaxed, the flood of the barbarian migration

of nations flowed westward from the primeval forests and frozen fields of Germania, attempting to cross the Rhine and enter Gaul. Foremost among these hordes were the savage and warlike Franks, led by a number of independent chiefs. The present story describes the two forces—Franks and Gauls, the latter supported by the Romans—facing each other, frequently crossing swords in bloody encounters and holding each other in check. Out of this material, into which the thin thread of the initial introduction of Christianity in Gaul is woven in the woof, Sue constructed the present superb narrative—a fit overture for the following and successive fourteen acts.

DANIEL DE LEON.

Milford, Conn., August, 1909.

INTRODUCTION.

INTRODUCTION.

I, Schanvoch, a descendant of Joel, the brenn of the tribe of Karnak; I, Schanvoch, now a freeman, thanks to the valor of my father Ralf and the bold Gallic insurrections that continued unabated from century to century; I, Schanvoch, write the following narrative two hundred and sixty-four years after my ancestress Genevieve, the wife of Fergan, witnessed in Judea the death of the poor carpenter Jesus of Nazareth.

I write the following account thirty-four years after Gomer, the son of Judicaël and grandson of Fergan, who was a slave like his father and grandfather, wrote to his son Mederik that he had nothing to add to the family annals but the monotonous account of his life as a slave.

Neither did my ancestor Mederik contribute aught to our family history, and his son Justin contented himself with having a stranger's hand enter these short lines:

"My father Mederik died a slave, fighting as a Son of the Mistletoe for the freedom of Gaul; he told me that he was driven to revolt against the foreign oppression by the narrative of the bravery of our free ancestors and by the description of the sufferance of our enslaved fathers. I, his son Justin, a colonist, and no longer a slave of the fisc, have caused this fact to be entered upon our family parchments, which I shall faithfully transmit to my son Aurel, together with their accompanying emblems, the gold sickle, the little

brass bell, the fragment of the iron collar and the little silver cross, all of which I have carefully preserved."

Aurel, Justin's son and a colonist like his father, was not any more literate than the latter, and left no record whatever. After him, again a stranger's hand inserted these lines in our family annals:

"Ralf, the son of Aurel the colonist, fought for the freedom of his country. Ralf having become absolutely free, thanks to the Gallic arms and the holy war preached by our venerable druids, found himself obliged to resort to a friend's help in order to enter the death of his father Aurel upon our family parchments. Happier than myself, my son Schanvoch will not be forced to avail himself of a stranger in order to enter in our family's archives the death of myself, the first male descendant of Joel, the brenn of the tribe of Karnak, who again regained complete freedom. As several of my ancestors have done before me, I here declare that it was the history of our ancestors' valor and martyrdom that induced me to take up arms against the Romans, our masters and secular oppressors."

These family scrolls, together with their accompanying relics, I shall leave to you, my dear little Alguen, the son of my beloved wife Ellen, who gave you birth this day four years ago.

I choose this day, the anniversary of your birth, as a day of happy augury, in order to start, for your benefit and the benefit of our descendants, the narrative of my life and my battles, my joys and my sorrows, obedient to the last wishes of our ancestor Joel, the brenn of the tribe of Karnak.

You will grieve, my son, when you learn from these archives that, from the death of Joel down to that of my great-

grandfather Justin, seven generations, aye, seven whole generations, were subjected to intolerable slavery. But your heart will be cheered when you learn that my great-grandfather had, from a slave, become a colonist or serf attached to the glebe of Gaul—still a servile condition but greatly above that of slavery. My own father, having regained his full freedom, thanks to the formidable insurrections of the Sons of the Mistletoe that from century to century were conjured up at the voice of the druids, the tireless and heroic defenders of the freedom of oppressed Gaul, has bequeathed to me freedom, that most precious of all wealth. I shall, in turn, transmit it to you.

By dint of constantly struggling for it, and also of stubborn resistance, we Gauls have succeeded in successively reconquering almost our full former freedom. A last and frail bond still holds us to Rome, now our ally, after having formerly been our pitiless master. When that last and frail bond will be snapped, we shall have regained our absolute independence, and we shall resume our former place at the head of the great nations of the world.

Before acquainting you with the details of my life and time, my son, I must fill certain voids that are left in the history of our family through the omissions of those of our ancestors, who, either through illiteracy or the hardness of the times, were prevented from joining their respective accounts to our archives. Their lives must have been the life of all the other Gauls, who, the fetters of slavery notwithstanding, have, step by step and from century to century, conquered through revolt and battle the deliverance of our country.

You will find in the last lines written by our ancestor

Fergan, the husband of Genevieve, that despite the vows taken by the Sons of the Mistletoe and despite innumerable uprisings, one of the most formidable of which was chieftained by Sacrovir, the worthy emulator of the Chief of the Hundred Valleys, the Roman yoke that Caesar imposed upon Gaul remained unshaken. In vain did Jesus, the carpenter of Nazareth, prophesy that the chains of the slave would be broken. The slaves still dragged their blood-stained chains. Nevertheless, our old race, weakened, mutilated, unnerved or corrupted though it was by slavery, never once was submissive, and allowed only short intervals to pass without endeavoring to shake off the yoke. The secret associations of the Sons of the Mistletoe covered the country, and furnished intrepid soldiers to each succeeding revolt against Rome.

After the heroic attempt of Sacrovir, the account of whose sublime death you will find in the narrative of our ancestor Fergan, the weak and timid weaver-slave, other insurrections broke out during the reigns of the Emperors Tiberius and Claudius; they increased in force during the civil wars that rent Italy under the reign of Nero. At about that time, one of our heroes, Vindex, as intrepid a patriot as Sacrovir or the Chief of the Hundred Valleys, long held the Roman arms in check. Civilis, another Gallic patriot, taking his stand upon the prophecies of Velleda—one of our female druids, a virile woman, wise in council and worthy compeer of our brave and wise mothers—roused almost all Gaul to revolt and gave the first serious wound to the power of Rome. Finally, during the reign of the Emperor Vitellius, a poor field slave like our ancestor Guilhern set himself up as the messiah and liberator of Gaul, just as Jesus of Nazareth proclaimed himself the Messiah of Judea, and pursued with patriotic ardor

the task of liberation that was started by the Chief of the Hundred Valleys and continued after him by Sacrovir, Vindex, Civilis and so many other heroes. That field slave's name was Marik. He was then barely twenty-five years of age; robust, intelligent and gifted with heroic bravery he joined the Sons of the Mistletoe. Our venerable druids, always persecuted, had traversed Gaul inciting the lukewarm, restraining the impatient, and preparing all for the hour of the insurrection. It broke out. At the head of ten thousand slaves, field laborers like himself and armed with their scythes and forks, Marik engaged the Roman troops of Vitellius under the walls of Lyons. That first attempt miscarried; the insurgents were cut to pieces by the Roman army that greatly exceeded them in numbers. But so far from feeling overwhelmed, this defeat intensified the ardor of the revolted people. Whole populations rose in rebellion at the voice of the druids that called them to the holy war. The combatants seemed to spring out of the entrails of the earth, and Marik saw himself again at the head of a numerous army. Endowed by the gods with a military instinct, he disciplined his troops, inspired them with courage and a blind confidence in him, and marched at their head towards the banks of the Rhine, where, sheltered behind its trenches, lay the reserve of the Roman army. Marik attacked it, beat it, and compelled whole legions that he took prisoner to drop their own ensigns and substitute them with our ancient Gallic cock. Those Roman legions had, due to their long sojourn in our country, virtually become Gauls; carried away by the military ascendency of Marik, they readily joined him, combatted under him against the fresh Roman columns that were sent from Italy, and either annihilated or dis-

persed them. The hour of Gaul's deliverance was about to sound—but at that moment Marik fell through cowardly treason into the hands of the monster Vespasian, then Emperor of Rome. Riddled with wounds the hero of Gaul was delivered to the wild beasts in the circus, like our own ancestor Sylvest.

The martyr's death exasperated the population. Fresh insurrections broke out forthwith all over Gaul. The words of Jesus of Nazareth, declaring that the slave is the equal of his master, began to penetrate our own country, filtering through on the lips of itinerant preachers. The flames of hatred for the foreign domination shot up with renewed vigor. Attacked from all sides in Gaul, harrassed on the other side of the Rhine by innumerable hordes of Franks, barbarous warriors that issued from the depths of the northern forests and seemed but to await the propitious moment to pour into Gaul, the Romans finally capitulated to us. At last we harvested the fruits of so many heroic sacrifices! The blood shed by our fathers for the previous three centuries watered our deliverance. Indeed, the words of the Chief of the Hundred Valleys were prophetic:

> "Flow, flow thou blood of the captive!
> Drop, drop thou dew of gore!
> Germinate, sprout up, thou avenging harvest!"

Yes, my son, those words were prophetic. It was with that refrain on their lips that our fathers fought and overcame the foreign oppressor. Rome, at last, yielded back to us a part of our ancient freedom. We formed Gallic legions commanded by our own officers; our provinces were once more governed by magistrates of our own choice. Rome reserved

only the right to appoint a "Principal" over Gaul, the suzerainty over which she was to retain. We accepted, while waiting and striving for better things—and these better things were not long in coming. Frightened by our continual revolts, our tyrants had been slowly moderating the rigor of our slavery. Terror was to force from them that which they relentlessly refused as a matter of right and justice to the voice of suppliant humanity. First the master was no longer allowed, as he was in the days of Sylvest and several of his descendants, to dispose over the life of his slaves as one disposes over the life of an animal. Later, as their fear increased, the masters were forbidden from inflicting corporal punishments upon their slaves, except with the express authorization of a magistrate. Finally, my child, that horrible Roman law, that, at the time of our ancestor Sylvest and of the five generations that followed him, declared in its ferocious language that the slave does not exist, that "he has no head" (*non caput habet*) that shocking law was, thanks to the dread inspired by our unceasing revolts, modified to the point that the Justinian code declared:

"Freedom is a natural right; it is the statute law that has created slavery; it has also created enfranchisement, which is the return to natural freedom."

Alack! It is distressing to notice that the sacred rights of humanity can not triumph except at the cost of torrents of blood and of unnumbered disasters! But who is to be cursed as the true cause of all such evils? Is it not the oppressor, seeing that he bends his fellow-men under the yoke of a frightful slavery, lives on the sweat of the brow of his fellow-men, depraves, debases and martyrizes his fellow-beings, kills

them to satisfy a whim or out of sheer cruelty, and thus compels them to reconquer by force the freedom that they have been deprived of? Never forget this, my son, if, once subjugated, the whole Gallic race had shown itself as patient, as timid, as resigned as did our poor ancestor Fergan the weaver, our slavery never would have been abolished! After vain appeals to the heart and reason of the oppressor, there is but one means left to overthrow tyranny—revolt—energetic, stubborn, unceasing revolt. Sooner or later right triumphs, as it triumphed with us! Let the blood that our triumph has cost fall upon the heads of those who enslaved us.

Accordingly, my son, thanks to our innumerable insurrections, slavery was at first replaced by the state of the colonist, or serfdom, the regime under which my great-grandfather Justin and my grandfather Aurel lived. Under that system, instead of being forced to cultivate under the whip and for the exclusive benefit of the Roman masters the lands that they had plundered us of by conquest, the colonist had a small share of the harvest that he gathered. He could no longer be sold as a draft horse, along with his children; he could no longer be submitted to the torture or killed; but they were, from father to children, compelled to remain attached to the same domain. If the domain was sold, the colonist likewise changed hands under the identical conditions of toil. Later the condition of the colonists was further improved; they were granted the rights of citizenship. When the Gallic legions were formed, the soldiers that composed them became completely free. My father Ralf, the son of a colonist, gained his freedom in that manner; I, the son of a soldier, brought up in camp, was born free; and I shall bequeath that freedom to you, as my father bequeathed it to me to-

gether with the duty to preserve it for your descendants.

When you will read this narrative, my son, after you will have become acquainted with the manifold sufferings of our ancestors, who were slaves for so many generations, you will appreciate the wisdom of the wish expressed by our ancestor Joel, the brenn of the tribe of Karnak. You will admire his sagacity in expecting that, by piously preserving the memory of its bravery and of the independence that it once enjoyed, the Gallic race would be able to draw from the horror for Roman oppression the strength to overthrow it.

At this writing I am thirty-eight years of age. My parents are long dead. Ralf, my father, a soldier in one of our Gallic legions, in which he enrolled at the age of eighteen in the south of Gaul, came into this region, near the western banks of the Rhine, along with the army. He was in all the battles that were fought with the ferocious hordes of the Franks, who, attracted by the fertility of our Gaul and by the wealth contained in our borders, encamped on the opposite shore of the river, ever ready to attempt a new invasion.

About four years ago a descent of the insular population of England was feared in Brittany. On that occasion several legions, the one in which my father enlisted among them, were ordered into that province. During several months he was quartered in the city of Vannes, not far from Karnak, the cradle of our family. Having had one of his friends read to him the narratives of our ancestors, Ralf visited with pious respect the battle field of Vannes, the sacred stones of Karnak, and the lands that we were plundered of in Caesar's time by the Roman conquerors. The lands were held by a Roman family; colonists, sons of the Breton Gauls of our tribe and who had formerly been in bondage,

now cultivated the lands that their ancestors one time owned. The daughter of one of those colonists loved my father; her love was reciprocated; her name was Madalene; she was one of those proud and virile Gallic women, that our ancestress Margarid, the wife of Joel, was a type of. She followed my father when his legion left Brittany to return to the banks of the Rhine, where I was born in the fortified camp of Mayence, a military city that our troops occupied. The chief of the legion to which my father belonged was the son of a field laborer. His bravery won him the post. On the day after my birth that chief's wife died in child-bed of a baby girl—a girl who, some day perhaps, may yet, from the retreat of her humble home, reign over the world as she reigns to-day over Gaul. To-day, at the time that I write, Victoria, by virtue of her distinguished wisdom, her eminent qualities, the benign influence that she exercises over her son Victorin and over our whole army, is, in point of fact, empress of Gaul.

Victoria is my foster-sister. Prizing the solid qualities of mind and heart that my mother was endowed with, when Victoria's father became a widower, he requested my mother to nurse his little babe. Accordingly, she and I grew up like brother and sister. We never since failed in the fraternal affection of our childhood. From her earliest age Victoria was serious and gentle, although she greatly delighted in the blare of trumpets and the sight of arms. She gave promise to be some day of that august beauty that mingles calmness, grace and energy, and that is peculiar to certain women of Gaul. You will see medals that have been struck in her honor when she was still a young maid. She is there represented as Diana the huntress, with a bow in one

hand and a torch in the other. On a later medal, struck about two years ago, Victoria is represented with her son Victorin in the guise of Minerva accompanied by Mars. At the age of ten she was sent by her father to a college of female druids. Being now again freed from Roman persecution, thanks to the new birth of Gallic freedom, the druids, male and female, again attended to the education of children as they did of yore.

Victoria remained with these venerable women until her fifteenth year. She drew from that patriotic and strict tuition an ardent love for her country, and information on all subjects. She left the college equipped with the secrets of former times, and, it is said, possessing, like Velleda and other female druids, the power of seeing into the future. At that period of her life the proud and virile beauty of Victoria was sublime. When she met me again she was happy and she did not conceal her joy. So far from declining through our long separation from each other, her affection for me, her foster-brother, had increased.

I must at this point make an admission to you, my son; I am free to make it because you will not read these lines until after you will be a man. You will find a good example of courage and abnegation in my confession.

When Victoria returned in her dazzling beauty of fifteen years I was of the same age and although hardly of the age of puberty myself, I fell distractedly in love with her. I carefully concealed my feelings, out of friendship as well as by reason of the respect that, despite the fraternal attachment of which she every day gave me fresh proof, that serious young maid, who brought with her from the college of the female druids an indescribably imposing, pensive and mys-

terious appearance, inspired in me. I then underwent a cruel trial. Ignorant of the feelings of my heart, as she ever will be, at fifteen and a half Victoria gave her hand to a young military chief. I came near dying of a slow consuming illness caused by my secret despair. So long as my life seemed in danger, Victoria did not leave the head of my couch. A tender sister could not have attended me with more devoted and touching care. She became a mother. Although a mother, she ever accompanied her husband, to whom she was passionately devoted, whenever called to war. By force of reflection I succeeded at last in overcoming, if not my love, at least its violent manifestations, the pain it gave me, the senselessness of the passion. But there remained in me a sense of boundless devotion towards my foster sister. She asked me to remain near her and her husband as a horseman in the body of cavalrymen that ordinarily act as escorts to the Gallic chiefs, and either take down in writing or convey their military orders. My foster-sister was barely eighteen years of age when, in a severe battle with the Franks, she lost on the same day both her father and her husband. A widow with her son, for whom she foresaw a glorious future, bravely verified by himself since then, Victoria never left the camp. The soldiers, accustomed ever to see her in their midst, with her child in her arms, and walking between her father and her husband, knew that more than once her profoundly wise advice prevailed in the councils of the chiefs as the advice of our mothers of old often prevailed in the councils of our forefathers. They came to look as a good omen upon the presence of this young woman, who was trained in the mysterious science of the druids. At the death of her father and husband they begged her not to leave the army, declaring to her

with naïve affection that thenceforth her son Victorin should be "Son of the Camps" and she the "Mother of the Camps." Touched by so much affection, Victoria remained with the troops, preserving her influence over the chiefs, directing them in the government of Gaul, sedulous in imparting a manly education to her son, and living as modestly as the wife of an officer.

Shortly after her husband's death, my foster-sister told me that she would never marry again, it being her intention to consecrate her life entirely to Victorin. The last and insane hope that I nursed when I saw her a widow and free again, was dashed. With time I recovered my senses. I suppressed my ill-starred love and gave no thought but to the service of Victoria and her son. A simple horseman in the army, I served my foster-sister as her secretary. Often she confided important state secrets to me. At times she even charged me with confidential embassies to the military chiefs of Gaul.

I taught Victorin to ride, to handle the lance and the sword. Soon I came to love him as an own son. A kinder and more generous disposition than that of the lad could not be imagined. Thus he grew up among the soldiers, who became attached to him by a thousand bonds of habit and of affection. At the age of fourteen he made his first campaign against the Franks, who were fast becoming as dangerous enemies to us as the Romans once were. I accompanied him. Like a true Gallic woman his mother remained on horseback and surrounded by the officers, on a hill from which the battle field could be seen on which her son was engaged. He comported himself bravely and was wounded. Being thus from early youth habituated to the life of war, the youth de-

veloped great military talents. Intrepid as the bravest of the soldiers, skilful and cautious as a veteran captain, generous to the full extent that his purse allowed it, of a joyful disposition, open and kind to all, he gained ever more the attachment of the army that soon divided with him its adoration for his mother.

The day finally arrived when Gaul, already almost independent, demanded to share with Rome the government of our country. The power was then divided between a Gallic and a Roman chief. Rome appointed Posthumus, and our troops unanimously acclaimed Victorin as the Gallic chief and general of the army. Shortly after, he married a young girl by whom he was dearly loved. Unfortunately she died within the year, leaving him a son. Victoria, now a grandmother, devoted herself to her son's child as she had done before to himself, and surrounded the babe with all the cares that the tenderest solicitude could inspire.

My early resolve was never to marry. I was nevertheless gradually attracted by the modest graces and the virtue of the daughter of one of the centurions of our army. She was your mother, Ellen, whom I married five years ago.

Such has been my life until this day, when I start the narrative that is to follow. Certain remarks of Victoria decided me to write it both for your benefit and the benefit of our descendants. If the expectations of my foster-sister, concerning several incidents in this narrative, are eventually realized, those of our relatives who in the centuries to come may happen to read this story will discover that Victoria, the Mother of the Camps, was gifted, like Hena, the Virgin of the Isle of Sen, and Velleda, the female druid and companion of Civilis, with the holy gift of prevision.

What I am here about to narrate happened a week ago. In order to fix the date with greater accuracy I certify that it is written in the city of Mayence, defended by our fortified camp on the borders of the Rhine, on the fifth day of the month of June, as the Romans reckon, of the seventh year of the joint principality of Posthumus and Victorin in Gaul, two hundred and sixty-four years after the death of Jesus of Nazareth, the friend of the poor, who was crucified in Jerusalem under the eyes of our ancestress Genevieve.

The Gallic camp, composed of tents and light but solid barracks, is massed around Mayence, which dominates it. Victoria lodges in the city; I occupy a little house not far from the one that she inhabits.

PART I.
FOREIGN FOES.

CHAPTER I.

SCHANVOCH AND SAMPSO.

The morning of the day that I am telling of, I quitted my bed with the dawn, leaving my beloved wife Ellen soundly asleep. I contemplated her for an instant. Her long loose hair partly covered her bosom; her sweet and beautiful head rested upon one of her folded arms, while the other reclined on your cradle, my son, as if to protect you even during her sleep. I lightly kissed both your foreheads, fearing to awake you. It required an effort on my part to refrain from tenderly embracing you both again and again. I was bound upon a venturesome expedition; perchance, the kiss that I hardly dared to give you was the last you were ever to receive from me. I left the room where you slept and repaired to the contiguous one to arm myself, to don my cuirass over my blouse, and take my casque and sword. I then left the house. At our threshold I met Sampso, my wife's sister, as gentle and beautiful as herself. She held her apron filled with flowers of different colors; they were still wet with the dew. She had just gathered them in our little garden. Seeing me, she smiled and blushed surprised.

"Up so early, Sampso?" I said to her. "I thought I was the first one stirring. But what is the purpose of these flowers?"

"Is it not to-day a year ago that I came to live with my sister Ellen and you—you forgetful Schanvoch?" she an-

swered with an affectionate smile. "I wish to celebrate the day in our old Gallic fashion. I went out for the flowers in order to garland the house-door, the cradle of your little Alguen, and his mother's head. But you, where are you bound to this morning in full armor?"

At the thought that this holiday might turn into a day of mourning for my family I suppressed a sigh, and answered my wife's sister with a smile that was intended to allay suspicion.

"Victoria and her son charged me yesterday with some military orders for the chief of a detachment that lies encamped some two leagues from here. It is the military custom to be armed when one has such orders in charge."

"Do you know, Schanvoch, that you must arouse jealousy in many a breast?"

"Because my foster-sister employs my soldier's sword during war and my pen during truces?"

"You forget to say that that foster-sister is Victoria the Great, and that Victorin, her son, entertains for you the respect that he would have for his mother's brother. Hardly a day goes by without Victoria's calling upon you. These are favors that many should envy."

"Have I ever sought to profit by these favors, Sampso? Have I not remained a simple horseman, ever declining to be an officer, and requesting the only favor of fighting at Victorin's side?"

"Whose life you have already twice saved when he was at the point of perishing under the blows of those barbarous Franks!"

"I did but my duty as a soldier and a Gaul. Should I not

sacrifice my life to that of a man who is so necessary to our country?"

"Schanvoch, we must not quarrel; you know how much I admire Victoria; but—"

"But I know your uncharitableness towards her son," I put in with a smile, "you austere and severe Sampso!"

"Is it any fault of mine if disorderly conduct finds no favor in my eyes—if I even consider it disgraceful?"

"Certes, you are right. Nevertheless I can not avoid being somewhat indulgent towards the foibles of Victorin. A widower at twenty, should he not be excused for yielding at times to the impulses of his age? Dear but implacable Sampso, I let you read the narrative of my ancestress Genevieve. You are gentle and good as Jesus of Nazareth, why do you not imitate his charity towards sinners? He forgave Magdalen because she had loved much. In the name of the same sentiment pardon Victorin!"

"There is nothing more worthy of forgiveness than love, when it is sincere. But debauchery has nothing in common with love. Schanvoch, it is as if you were to say to me that my sister and I could be compared with those Bohemian girls who recently arrived in Mayence."

"In point of looks they might be compared with you or Ellen, seeing that they are said to be ravishingly beautiful. But the comparison ends there, Sampso. I trust but little the virtue of those strollers, however charming, however brilliantly arrayed they may be, who travel from town to town singing and dancing for public amusement—even if they indulge not in worse practices."

"And for all that, I make no doubt that, when you least expect it, you will see Victorin the general of the army, one

of the two Chiefs of Gaul, accompany on horseback the chariot in which these Bohemian girls promenade every evening along the borders of the Rhine. And if I should feel indignant at the sight of the son of Victoria serving as escort to such creatures, you would surely say to me: 'Forgive the sinner, just as Jesus forgave Magdalen the sinner.' Go to, Schanvoch, the man who can delight in unworthy amours is capable of—"

But Sampso suddenly broke off.

"Finish your sentence," I said to her, "express yourself in full, I pray you."

"No," she answered after reflecting a moment; "the time has not yet come for that. I would not like to risk a hasty word."

"See here," I said to her, "I am sure that what you have in mind is one of those ridiculous stories about Victorin that for some time have been floating about in the army, without its being possible to trace the slanders to their source. Can you, Sampso, you, with all your good sense and good heart, make yourself the echo of such gossip, such unworthy calumnies?"

"Adieu, Schanvoch; I told you I was not going to quarrel with you, dear brother, on the subject of the hero whom you defend against all comers."

"What would you have me do? It is my foible. I love his mother as an own sister. I love her son as if he were my own. Are you not as guilty as myself, Sampso? Is not my little Alguen, your sister's son, as dear to you as if he were your own child? Take my word for it, when Alguen will be twenty and you hear him accused of some youthful indiscretion, you will, I feel quite sure, defend him with even more

warmth than I defend Victorin. But we need not wait so long, have you not begun your role of pleader for him, already? When the rascal is guilty of some misconduct, is it not his aunt Sampso whom he fetches to intercede in his behalf? He knows how you love him!"

"Is not my sister's son mine?"

"Is that the reason you do not wish to marry?"

"Surely, brother," she answered with a blush and a slight embarrassment. After a moment's silence she resumed:

"I hope you will be back home at noon to complete our little feast?"

"The moment my mission is fulfilled I shall return. Adieu, Sampso!"

"Adieu, Schanvoch!"

And leaving his wife's sister engaged in her work of garlanding the house-door, Schanvoch walked rapidly away, revolving in his mind the topic of the conversation that Sampso had just broached.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE RHINE.

I had often asked myself why Sampso, who was a year older than Ellen, and as beautiful and virtuous as my wife, had until then rejected several offers of marriage. At times I suspected that she entertained some secret love, other times I surmised she might belong to one of the Christian societies that began to spread over Gaul and in which the women took the vow of virginity, as did several of our female druids. I also pondered the reason for Sampso's reticence when I asked her to be more explicit concerning Victorin. Soon, however, I dropped all these subjects and turned my mind upon the expedition that I had in charge.

I wended my way towards the advance posts of the camp and addressed myself to an officer under whose eyes I placed a scroll with a few lines written by Victorin. The officer immediately put four picked soldiers at my disposal. They were chosen from among a number whose special department was to manoeuvre the craft of the military flotilla that was used in ascending or descending the Rhine in order, whenever occasion required, to defend the fortified camp. Upon my recommendation the four soldiers left their arms behind. I alone was armed. As we passed a clump of oak trees I cut down a few branches to be placed at the prow of the bark that was to transport us. We soon arrived at the

river bank, where we found several boats that were reserved for the service of the army, tied to their stakes. While two of the soldiers fastened on the prow of the boat the oak branches that I had furnished them with, the other two examined the oars with expert eyes in order to assure themselves that they were in fit condition for use. I took the rudder, and we left the shore.

The four soldiers rowed in silence for a while. Presently the oldest of them, a veteran with a grey moustache and white hair, said to me:

"There is nothing like a Gallic song to make time pass quickly and the oars strike in rhythm. I should say that some old national refrain, sung in chorus, renders the sculls lighter and the water more easy to cleave through. Are we allowed to sing, friend Schanvoch?"

"You seem to know me, comrade?"

"Who in the army does not know the foster-brother of the Mother of the Camps?"

"Being a simple horseman I thought my name was more obscure than it seems to be."

"You have remained a simple horseman despite our Victoria's friendship for you. That is why, Schanvoch, everybody knows and esteems you."

"You certainly make me feel happy by saying so. What is your name?"

"Douarnek."

"You must be a Breton!"

"From the neighborhood of Vannes."

"My family also comes from that neighborhood."

"I thought as much, your name being a Breton name. Well, friend Schanvoch, may we sing a song? Our officer

gave us orders to obey you as we would himself. I know not whither you are taking us, but a song is heard far away, especially when it is struck up in chorus by vigorous and broad-chested lads. Perhaps we must not draw attention upon our bark?"

"Just now you may sing—later not—we shall have to advance without making any noise."

"Well, boys, what shall we sing?" said the veteran without either himself or his companions intermitting the regular strokes of their oars, and only slightly turning his head towards them, seeing that, seated as he was on the first bench, he sat opposite to me. "Come, make your choice!"

"The song of the mariners, will that suit you?" answered one of the soldiers.

"That is rather long," replied Douarnek.

"The song of the Chief of the Hundred Valleys?"

"That is very beautiful," again replied Douarnek, "but it is a song of slaves who await their deliverance; by the bones of our fathers, we are now free in old Gaul!"

"Friend Douarnek," said I, "it was to the refrain of that slaves' song—'Flow, flow, thou blood of the captive! Drop, drop, thou dew of gore!' that our fathers, arms in hand, reconquered the freedom that we enjoy to-day."

"That is true, Schanvoch, but that song is very long, and you warned us that we were soon to become silent as fishes."

"Douarnek," one of the soldiers spoke up, "sing to us the song of Hena the Virgin of the Isle of Sen. It always brings tears to my eyes. She is my favorite saint, the beautiful and sweet Hena, who lived centuries and centuries ago."

"Yes, yes," said the other soldiers, "sing the song of Hena,

Douarnek! That song predicts the victory of Gaul—and Gaul is to-day triumphant!"

Hearing these words I was greatly moved, I felt happy and, I confess it, proud at seeing that the name of Hena, dead more than three hundred years, had remained in Gaul as popular as it was at the time of Sylvest.

"Very well, the song of Hena it shall be!" replied the veteran. "I also love the sweet and saintly girl, who offered her blood to Hesus for the deliverance of Gaul. And you, Schanvoch, do you know the song?"

"Yes—quite well—I have heard it sung—"

"You will know it enough to repeat the refrain with us."

Saying this Douarnek struck up the song in a full and sonorous voice that reached far over the waters of the Rhine:

"She was young, she was fair,
And holy was she.
To Hesus her blood gave
That Gaul might be free.
Hena her name!
Hena, the Maid of the Island of Sen!

"—Blessed be the gods, my sweet daughter,—
Said her father Joel,
The brenn of the tribe of Karnak.
—Blessed be the gods, my sweet daughter,
Since you are at home this night
To celebrate the day of your birth!—

"—Blessed be the gods, my sweet girl,—
Said Margarid, her mother.
—Blessed be your coming!
But why is your face so sad?—

"—My face is sad, my good mother;
My face is sad, my good father,
Because Hena your daughter
Comes to bid you Adieu,
Till we meet again.—

"—And where are you going, my sweet daughter?
Will your journey, then, be long?
Whither thus are you going?—

"—I go to those worlds
So mysterious, above,
That no one yet knows,
But that all will yet know.
Where living ne'er traveled,
Where all will yet travel,
To live there again
With those we have loved.—"

And myself and the three other oarsmen replied in chorus:

"She was young, she was fair,
And holy was she.
To Hesus her blood gave,
That Gaul might be free.
Hena her name!
Hena, the Maid of the Island of Sen!"

Douarnek then proceeded with the song:

"Hearing Hena speak these words,
Sadly gazed upon her her father
And her mother, aye, all the family,
Even the little children,
For Hena loved them very dearly.

"—But why, dear daughter,
Why now quit this world,
And travel away beyond
Without the Angel of Death having called you?—

"—Good father, good mother,
Hesus is angry.
The stranger now threatens our Gaul so beloved.
The innocent blood of a virgin
Offered by her to the gods
May their anger well soften.
Adieu, then, till we meet again,
Good father, good mother,
Adieu till we meet again,
All, my dear ones and friends.
These collars preserve, and these rings

As mementoes of me.
Let me kiss for the last time your blonde heads,
Dear little ones. Good bye till we meet.
Remember your Hena, she waits for you yonder,
In the worlds yet unknown.—"

And the other oarsmen and I replied in chorus to the rythmical sound of the oars:

"She was young, she was fair,
And holy was she.
To Hesus her blood gave
That Gaul might be free.
Hena her name.
Hena, the Maid of the Island of Sen!"

Douarnek proceeded:

"Bright is the moon, high is the pyre
Which rises near the sacred stones of Karnak;
Vast is the gathering of the tribes
Which presses 'round the funeral pile.

"Behold her, it is she, it is Hena!
She mounts the pyre, her golden harp in hand,
And singeth thus:

"—Take my blood, O Hesus,
And deliver my land from the stranger.
Take my blood, O Hesus,
Pity for Gaul! Victory to our arms!—
And it flowed, the blood of Hena.

"O, holy Virgin, in vain 'twill not have been,
The shedding of your innocent and generous blood.
Bowed beneath the yoke, Gaul will some day rise erect,
Free and proud, and crying, like thee,
—Victory and Freedom!"

And Douarnek, along with the three other soldiers, repeated in a low voice, vibrating with pious admiration, this last refrain:

"So it was that she offered her blood to Hesus,
To Hesus for the deliverance of Gaul!
She was young, she was fair,
And holy was she,
Hena her name!
Hena, the Maid of the Island of Sen!"

I alone did not join in the last refrain of the song. I was too deeply moved!

Noticing my emotion and my silence, Douarnek said to me surprised:

"What, Schanvoch, have you lost your voice? You remain silent at the close of so glorious a song?"

"Your speech is sooth, Douarnek; it is just because that song is particularly glorious to me—that you see me so deeply moved."

"That song is particularly glorious to you? I do not understand you."

"Hena was the daughter of one of my ancestors."

"What say you!"

"Hena was the daughter of Joel, the brenn of the tribe of Karnak, who died, together with his wife and almost all his family, at the great battle of Vannes—a battle that was fought on land and water nearly three centuries ago. From father to son, I descend from Joel."

"Do you know, Schanvoch," replied Douarnek, "that even kings would be proud of such an ancestry?"

"The blood shed for our country and for liberty by all of us Gauls is our national patent of nobility," I said to him. "It is for that reason that our old songs are so popular among us."

"When one considers," put in one of the younger soldiers, "that it is now more than three hundred years since Hena,

the saintly maid, surrendered her own life for the deliverance of the country, and that her name still reaches us!"

"Although it took the young virgin's voice more than two centuries to rise to the ears of Hesus," replied Douarnek, "her voice did finally reach him, seeing that to-day we can say—Victory to our arms! Victory and freedom!"

We had now arrived at about the middle of the river, where the stream is very rapid.

Raising his oar, Douarnek asked me:

"Shall we enter the strong current? That would be a waste of strength, unless we are either to ascend or descend the river a distance equal to that that now separates us from the shore."

"We are to cross the Rhine in its full breadth, friend Douarnek."

"Cross it!" cried the veteran with amazement. "Cross the Rhine! And what for?"

"To land on the opposite shore."

"Do you know what that means, Schanvoch? Is not the army of those Frankish bandits, if one can honor those savage hordes with the name of army, encamped on the opposite shore?"

"It is to those very barbarians that I am bound."

For a few moments all the four oars rested motionless in their oarlocks. The soldiers looked at one another speechless, as if they could not believe what they heard me say.

Douarnek was the first to break the silence. With a soldier's unconcern he said to me:

"Is it, then, a sacrifice that we are to offer to Hesus by delivering our hides to those hide-tanners? If such be the orders, forward! Bend to your oars, my lads!"

"Have you forgotten, Douarnek, that we have a truce of eight days with the Franks?"

"There is no such thing as a truce to those brigands."

"As you will notice, I have made the signal of peace by ornamenting the prow of our bark with green boughs. I shall proceed alone into the enemy's camp, with an oak branch in my hand."

"And they will slay you despite all your oak branches, as they have slain other envoys during previous truces."

"That may happen, Douarnek; but when the chief commands, the soldier obeys. Victoria and her son have ordered me to proceed to the Frankish camp. So thither I go!"

"It surely was not out of fear that I spoke, Schanvoch, when I said that those savages would not leave our heads on our shoulders, nor our skins on our bodies. I only spoke from the old habit of sincerity. Well, then, my lads, fall to with a will! Bend to your oars! We have the order from our mother—the Mother of the Camps—and we obey. Forward! even if we are to be flayed alive by the barbarians, a cruel sport that they often indulge in at the expense of their prisoners."

"And it is also said," put in the young soldier with a less unperturbed voice than Douarnek's, "it is also said that the priestesses of the nether world who follow the Frankish hordes drop their prisoners into large brass caldrons, and boil them alive with certain magic herbs."

"Ha! Ha!" replied Douarnek merrily, "the one of us who may be boiled in that way will at least enjoy the advantage of being the first to taste his own soup—that's some consolation. Forward! Ply your oars! We are obeying orders from the Mother of the Camps."

"Oh! We would row straight into an abyss, if Victoria so ordered!"

"She has been well named, the Mother of the Camps and of the soldiers. It is a treat to see her visiting the wounded after each battle."

"And addressing them with her kind words, that almost make the whole ones regret that they have not been wounded, too."

"And then she is so beautiful. Oh, so beautiful!"

"Oh! When she rides through the camp, mounted on her white steed, clad in her long black robe, her bold face looking out from under her casque, and yet her eyes shining with so much mildness, and her smile so motherly! It is like a vision!"

"It is said for certain that our Victoria knows the future as well as she knows the present."

"She must have some charm about her. Who would believe, seeing her, that she is the mother of a son of twenty-two?"

"Oh! If the son had only fulfilled the promise that his younger years gave!"

"Victorin will always be loved as he has been."

"Yes, but it is a great pity!" remarked Douarnek shaking his head sadly, after the other soldiers had thus given vent to their thoughts and feelings. "Yes, it is a great pity! Oh! Victorin is no longer the child of the camps that we, old soldiers with grey moustaches, knew as a baby, rode on our knees, and, down to only recently, looked upon with pride and friendship!"

The words of these soldiers struck me with deeper apprehension than Sampso's words did a few hours before. Not

only did I often have to defend Victorin with the severe Sampso, but I had latterly noticed in the army a silent feeling of resentment towards my foster-sister's son, who until then, was the idol of the soldiers.

"What have you to reproach Victorin with?" I asked Douarnek and his companions. "Is he not brave among the bravest? Have you not watched his conduct in war?"

"Oh! If a battle is on, he fights bravely, as bravely as yourself, Schanvoch, when you are at his side, on your large bay horse, and more intent upon defending the son of your foster-sister than upon defending yourself. *'Your scars would declare it, if they could speak through the mouths of your wounds,'* as our old proverb says!"

"I fight as a soldier; Victorin fights as a captain. And has not that young captain of only twenty-two years already won five great battles against the Germans and the Franks?"

"His mother, well named Victoria, must have contributed with her counsel towards his victories. He confers with her upon his plans of campaign. But, anyhow, it is true, Victorin is a brave soldier and good captain."

"And is not his purse open to all, so long as there is anything in it? Do you know of any invalid who ever vainly applied to him?"

"Victorin is generous—that also is true."

"Is he not the friend and comrade of the soldiers? Is he ever haughty?"

"No, he is a good comrade, and always cheerful. Besides, what should he be proud about? Are not his father, his glorious mother and himself from the Gallic plebs, like the rest of us?"

"Do you not know, Douarnek, that often it happens that

the proudest people are the very ones who have risen from the lowest ranks?"

"Victorin is not proud!"

"Does he not, during war, sleep unsheltered with his head upon the saddle of his horse, like the rest of us horsemen?"

"Brought up by so virile a mother as his, he was bound to grow up a rough soldier, as he is."

"Are you not aware that in council he displays a maturity of judgment that many men of our age do not possess? In short, is it not his bravery, his kindness, his good judgment, his rare military qualities as a soldier and captain that caused him to be acclaimed general by the army, and one of the two Chiefs of Gaul?"

"Yes, but in electing him, all of us knew that his mother Victoria would always be near him, guiding him, instructing him, schooling him in the art of governing men, without neglecting, worthy matron that she is, to sew her linen near the cradle of her grandson, as is her thrifty habit."

"No one knows better than I how precious the advices of Victoria to her son are to our country. But what is it, then, that has changed? Is she not always there, watching over Victorin and Gaul that she loves with equal and paternal devotion? Come, now, Douarnek, answer me with a soldier's frankness. Whence comes the hostility that, I fear, is ever spreading and deepening against Victorin, our young and brave general?"

"Listen, Schanvoch. I am, like yourself, a seasoned soldier. Your moustache, although younger than mine, begins to show grey streaks. Do you want to know the truth? Here it is: We are all aware that the life of the camp does not make people chaste and reserved like young girls who are

brought up by our venerated female druids. We also know, because we have emptied many a cup, that our Gallic wines throw us into a merry and riotous humor. We know, furthermore, that when he is in a garrison, the young soldier who proudly carries a cockade on his casque and caresses his brown or blonde moustache, does not long preserve the friendship of fathers who have handsome daughters, or of husbands who have handsome wives. But, for all that, you will have to admit, Schanvoch, that a soldier who is habitually intoxicated like a brute, and takes cowardly advantage of women, would deserve to be treated to a hundred or more stripes laid on well upon his back, and to be ignominiously driven from camp. Is not that so?"

"That is all very true, but what connection has it with Victorin?"

"Listen, friend Schanvoch, and then answer me. If an obscure soldier deserves such treatment for his shameful conduct, what should be done to an army chief who disgraces himself in such fashion?"

"Do you venture to say that Victorin has offered violence to women and that he is daily drunk?" I cried indignantly. "I say that you lie, or those who carried such tales to you lied. So, these are the unworthy rumors that circulate in the camp against Victorin! And can you be credulous enough to attach faith to them?"

"Soldiers are not quite so credulous, friend Schanvoch, but they are aware of the old Gallic proverb—'The lost sheep are charged to the shepherd.' Now, for instance, you know Captain Marion, the old blacksmith?"

"Yes, I know the brave fellow to be one of the best officers in the army."

"The famous Captain Marion, who can carry an ox on his shoulders," put in one of the soldiers, "and who can knock down the same ox with a blow of his fist—his arm is as heavy as the iron mace of a butcher."

"And Captain Marion," added another oarsman, "is a good comrade, for all that, despite his strength and military renown. He took a simple soldier, a former fellow blacksmith, for his 'friend in war,' or, as they used to say in olden times, took the 'pledge of brotherhood' with him."

"I am aware of the bravery, modesty, good judgment and austerity of Captain Marion," I answered him, "but why do you now bring in his name?"

"Have a little patience, friend Schanvoch, I shall satisfy you in a minute. Did you see the two Bohemian girls enter Mayence a few days ago in a wagon drawn by mules covered with tinkling bells and led by a Negro lad?"

"I did not see the women, but have heard them mentioned. But I must insist upon it, what has all this got to do with Victorin?"

"I have reminded you of the proverb—'The lost sheep are charged to the shepherd.' It would be idle to attribute habits of drunkenness and incontinence to Captain Marion, would it not? Despite all his simpleness, the soldier would not believe a word of such slanders; not so? While, on the other hand, the soldier would be ready to believe any story of debauchery about the said Bohemian strollers, and he would trust the narrator of the tale, do you understand?"

"I understand you, Douarnek, and I shall be frank in turn. Yes, Victorin loves wine and indulges in it with some of his companions in arms. Yes, having been left a widower at the

age of twenty, only a few months after his marriage, Victorin has occasionally yielded to the headlong impulses of youth. Often did his mother, as well as myself, regret that he was not endowed with greater austerity in morals, a virtue, however, that is extremely rare at his age. But, by the anger of the gods! I, who have never been from Victorin's side since his earliest childhood, deny that drunkenness is habitual with him; above all I deny that he ever was base enough to do violence to a woman!"

"Schanvoch, you defend the son of your foster-sister out of the goodness of your heart, although you know him to be guilty—unless you really are ignorant of what you deny—"

"What am I ignorant of?"

"An adventure that has raised a great scandal, and that everybody in camp knows."

"What adventure?"

"A short time ago Victorin and several officers of the army went to a tavern on one of the isles near the border of the Rhine to drink and make merry. In the evening, being by that time drunk as usual, Victorin violated the tavern-keeper's wife, who, in her despair, threw herself into the river and was drowned."

"The soldier who misdemeaned himself in that manner," remarked one of the oarsmen, "would speedily have his head cut off by a strict chief."

"And he would have deserved the punishment," added another oarsman. "As much as the next man, I would find pleasure in bantering with the tavern-keeper's wife. But to offer her violence, that is an act of savagery worthy only of those Frankish butchers, whose priestesses, veritable devil's cooks, boil their prisoners alive in their caldrons."

I was so stupefied by the accusation made against Victorin that I remained silent for a moment. But my voice soon came to me and I cried:

"Calumny! A calumny as infamous as the act would have been. Who is it dares accuse Victoria's son of such a crime?"

"A well informed man," Douarnek answered me.

"His name! Give me the liar's name!"

"His name is Morix. He was the secretary of one of Victoria's relatives. He came to the camp about a month ago to confer upon grave matters."

"The relative is Tetrik, the Governor of Gascony," I said with increased stupefaction. "The man is the incarnation of kindness and loyalty; he is one of Victoria's oldest and most faithful friends."

"All of which renders the man's testimony all the more reliable."

"What! He, Tetrik! Did Tetrik confirm what you have just said?"

"He communicated it to his secretary, and confirmed the occurrence, while deploring the shocking excesses of Victorin's dissoluteness."

"Calumny! Tetrik has only words of kindness and esteem for Victoria's son."

"Schanvoch, I have served in the army for the last twenty-five years. Ask my officers whether Douarnek is a liar."

"I believe you to be sincere; only you have been shamefully imposed upon."

"Morix, the secretary of Tetrik, narrated the occurrence not to me only but to other soldiers in the camp for whose wine he was paying. We all placed confidence in his words,

because more than once did I myself and several others of my companions see Victorin and his friends heated with wine and indulging in crazy feats of arms."

"Does not the ardor of courage heat up young heads as much as wine?"

"Listen, Schanvoch, I have seen—with my own eyes—Victorin drive his steed into the Rhine saying that he would cross the river on horseback; and he would certainly have been drowned had not another soldier and I rushed into a boat and fished him half drunk out of the water, while the current carried his horse away. And do you know what Victorin then said to us? 'You should have let me drink; the white wine of Beziers runs in this stream.' What I am telling you now is no calumny, Schanvoch, I saw it with my own eyes, heard it with my own ears."

Despite my attachment to Victorin I could not but reply to the soldier's testimony, saying: "I knew him to be incapable of an act of cowardice and infamy; but I also knew him to be capable of certain acts of extravagance and hotheadedness."

"As to myself," replied another soldier, "more than once, as I mounted guard near Victorin's house which is separated from Victoria's by a little plot of flowers, have I seen veiled women leave his place at early dawn. They were of all colors and sizes, blondes and brunettes, tall and short, some robust and stout, others slender and thin. At least, that was the impression that the women left upon me, unless the gloaming deceived my sight, and it was always the same woman."

"I notice that you are too sincere to make any answer to that, friend Schanvoch," Douarnek said to me; indeed, I

could raise no objection against the latter accusation. "You must, therefore, not feel surprised at our trust in the words of Tetrik's secretary. You must admit that the man who in a drunken fit takes the Rhine for a stream of Bezier's wine, and from whose house a procession of women is seen to issue in the morning, is quite capable, in a fit of inebriety, of doing violence to a tavern-keeper's wife."

"No!" I cried. "A man may be afflicted with the faults of his years in an aggravated degree, without therefore being an infamous fellow, a criminal!"

"See here, Schanvoch, you are the personal friend of our mother Victoria. You love Victorin as if he were your own son. Say to him—'The soldiers, even the grossest and most dissolute among them, do not like to see their own vices reproduced in the chief whom they have chosen. By your conduct, the army's affection is daily withdrawn more and more from you and is centering wholly upon Victoria.'"

"Yes," I answered thoughtfully, "and the process started since Tetrik, the Governor of Gascony, the relative and friend of Victoria, made his last visit to our camp. Until then our young chief was generally beloved, despite his little foibles."

"That is true. He is so good, so brave, so kind to all! He sat his horse so well! He had so bold a military bearing! We loved the young captain as an own child! We knew him as a babe, and rode him on our knees when still a little fellow, during the watches in the camp! Later we shut our eyes to his foibles, because parents are ever indulgent! But there can be no room for indulgence towards baseness!"

"And of this baseness," I replied, now more and more forcibly struck by the circumstance, which, recalling certain incidents to my mind, awakened a vague suspicion in me,

"and of these acts of baseness there is no evidence other than the word of Tetrik's secretary?"

"The secretary repeated to us his own master's words."

During this conversation, to which I lent increasing attention, our bark, ever moving forward under the vigorous strokes of the four oarsmen, had traversed the Rhine and reached the opposite shore. The soldier's backs were turned to the bank on which we were about to land. I was so wholly absorbed in what I had just learned regarding the army's increasing disaffection towards Victorin, that I never once thought of casting my eyes upon the shore to which we were drawing near. Suddenly a sharp whizz struck our ears. I cried out: "Throw yourselves down flat upon your benches!"

It was too late. A volley of long arrows flew over our boat. One of the oarsmen was instantly killed, while Douarnek, whose back was still turned to the shore received one of the arrows in the back.

"This is the way the Franks receive parliamentarians during a truce," remarked the veteran without dropping his oar, and even without turning around. "This is the first time I have been hit in the back. An arrow in the back does not become a soldier. Pull it out quick, comrade," he added, addressing the oarsman who sat behind him.

But despite his intrepidity, Douarnek managed his oar with less vigor. Although the wound that he received was not serious, his face betrayed the pain that he felt; the blood flowed copiously.

"I told you so, Schanvoch," he proceeded to say. "I told you that your foliage of peace would prove a poor rampart against the treachery of the Frankish barbarians. Fall to, my lads! We must now row all the harder, seeing we are

only three left. Our comrade yonder, who is bumping his nose against his bench, with his limbs stiffened, can no longer count as an oarsman!"

Douarnek had not finished his sentence before I dashed forward to the prow of the bark, and passing over the corpse of the soldier who lay dead across his bench seized one of the oak branches and waved it over my head as a signal of peace.

A second volley of arrows, that came flying from behind an embankment of the river, was the only answer to my appeal. One of the missiles grazed my arm, another broke off its point against my iron casque; but none of the soldiers was hit. We were then only a short distance from the shore. I threw myself into the water, swam a little distance, and as soon as my feet struck ground called out to Douarnek:

"Pull the bark safely beyond the reach of the arrows and drop anchor, then wait for me. If I am not back after sunset, return to camp and inform Victoria that I have either been made prisoner or killed by the Franks. She will take my wife Ellen and my son Alguen under her protection."

"I do not at all like the idea of leaving you alone in the hands of those barbarians, friend Schanvoch," answered Douarnek; "but to stay where we can be killed would be to deprive you of all possible means of return to our camp, should you be lucky enough to escape with your life. Courage, Schanvoch! We shall await the evening!"

And the bark pulled away, while I clambered up the embankment.

CHAPTER III.

THE HORDES OF THE FRANKS.

I had hardly reached the shore, always holding the green oak branch aloft, when I saw a large number of Franks, belonging to the hordes of their army, rush forward from behind the rocks where they had lain in ambush. They carried black bucklers and wore casques made of black calves' skin. Their arms, legs and faces were dyed black in order to escape detection when they march in the shadow of the forests or contemplate an attack in the night. Their appearance was rendered all the more hideous and strange, seeing that their chiefs were tattooed with a bright red on their foreheads, their cheeks and around their eyes. My long sojourn along the Rhine enabled me to speak the Frankish tongue with sufficient fluency.

The black warriors emitted savage yells, surrounded me from all sides and threatened me with their long knives, the blades of which also were blackened in the fire.

"A truce has been concluded, several days ago," I cried out to them; "I have come in the name of the chief of the Gallic army with a message to the chiefs of your hordes. Lead me to them. You surely will not kill an unarmed man?"

Saying this I drew my sword and threw it away. The barbarians immediately precipitated themselves upon me, redoubling their cries for my blood. Some of them unwound

the cords of their bows, and, despite all my remonstrances, threw me to the ground and bound me fast.

"Let us flay him," said one. "We shall carry his skin to the chief Neroweg, the Terrible Eagle. It will serve him as a bandage to wrap his legs in."

I was well aware that the Franks often skinned their enemies alive with great dexterity, and that the chiefs of their hordes decked themselves triumphantly with such human spoils. The proposition that I be skinned alive was received with shouts of approval; those who held me down began to cast about for a convenient place to perform the operation; others started to sharpen their knives upon the pebbles.

At this juncture, the warrior in command of the band approached me. The man was horrible to behold. A bright red tattoo encircled his eyes and streaked his cheeks. The marks looked like bleeding wounds, standing off strongly against his blackened face. His hair, raised after the Frankish style over his forehead and tied in a knot on top of his head, fell back like the plume of a helmet over his shoulders, and was of a coppery yellow, due to the lime-water that those barbarians used in order to impart a warm bright color to their hair and beard.[1] Around his neck and his wrists he wore a necklace and bracelets of rough wrought tin. His raiment consisted of a casque of black calfskin; strips of black calfskin fastened with criss-cross bandelets, covered his thighs and lower extremities. A sword and a long knife hung from his belt. After fixedly looking at me for a moment, he raised his hand and letting it down on my shoulder said:

[1] The Frankish chiefs, at the time of the conquest, daubed their hair with tallow mixed with crushed limestone, to make their hair a glaring reddish-yellow. Such was the beauty of the period.

"I shall take and keep this Gaul for Elwig. He is my prisoner."

Muffled growls from several of the other black warriors greeted these words of their chief, who, raising his voice, proceeded to say:

"I, Riowag, will take this Gaul to the priestess Elwig. Elwig needs a prisoner for her auguries."

The chief's decision was acquiesced in by the majority of the black warriors; the growls ceased; and a mob of voices repeated in chorus:

"Yes, yes; the Gaul must be kept for Elwig!"

"He must be taken to Elwig!"

"It is many days since she consulted our tutelary deities!"

"And we," cried one of the black warriors who had bound me, "we object to having the prisoner delivered to Elwig. We want to flay him and present his skin in token of homage to the chief Neroweg, the Terrible Eagle; he will reward us with some present."

There is small choice between being skinned alive and being boiled in a brass caldron. I did not feel called upon to manifest my preferences, and took no part whatever in the debate. Already those who wished to flay me cast savage glances at those who insisted that I be boiled, and carried their hands to their knives, when one of the black warriors proposed a compromise to the chief:

"Riowag, do you want to deliver the Gaul to the priestess Elwig?"

"Yes," answered the chief; "yes, I want to, and it shall be done as I order!"

"And the rest of you," proceeded the conciliatory black

warrior, "you wish to offer the Gaul's skin to the chief Neroweg?"

"That is what we propose to do!"

"Very well, you can be accommodated, both."

A profound silence fell all around at these conciliatory words. The black warrior proceeded:

"First, flay him alive, you will then have his skin; after that Elwig will boil his body in her caldron."

The compromise seemed at first to satisfy both parties, but Riowag, the captain of the band, objected:

"Do you not know that Elwig needs a living prisoner to render her auguries certain? You would be giving her only a corpse if you first flay the Gaul."

And he added in a terrific voice:

"Would you expose yourselves to the anger of the gods of the nether world by depriving them of a victim?"

At this threat a shudder ran through the surrounding black warriors, and the party that demanded my skin seemed about to yield to a superstitious terror.

The peacemaker, the warrior who had proposed that I be first flayed and then boiled, now spoke again:

"Some of you wish to present the Gaul as an offering to the great Neroweg, others of you wish to present him to the priestess Elwig. Now do you not see that to give to the one is to give to the other also? Is not Elwig Neroweg's sister?"

"And he would be the first to surrender the Gaul to the gods of the nether world, in order to render them propitious to our arms!" put in Riowag.

The captain of the black warriors pointed thereupon at me, and added imperiously:

"Take the Gaul on your shoulders and follow me!"

"We want to have his spoils," said one of the black warriors who were the first to seize me. "We want his casque, his cuirass, his blouse, his belt, his shirt. We want everything, down to his shoes!"

"The booty belongs to you," answered Riowag. "You will have it so soon as Elwig will have stripped the Gaul preparatorily to throwing him into her caldron."

"We shall go with you, Riowag," replied the black warriors who made the arrest, "otherwise others than ourselves will take possession of the plunder from the Gaul."

My perplexity was now at an end. I knew my fate. I was to be boiled alive. I would have gladly looked a useful or brave death in the face; but the death that awaited me seemed so barren and absurd, that I decided to make one more effort to save my life. Addressing the captain of the black warriors, I said:

"Your conduct is unjust. Frankish warriors have often come to the Gallic camp to solicit an exchange of prisoners. Those Franks have always been respected. A truce is now in force between us, during a truce only spies who furtively enter the camp are put to death. I have come in open daylight, with a green bough in my hand, and in the name of Victorin, the son of Victoria. I am the carrier of a message from them for the chiefs of the Frankish army. Take care! If you act without orders from them, they will be sorry for not having heard me, and they may make you pay dearly for your treachery towards a soldier, who comes unarmed, during a truce, and in broad daylight, with the bough of peace in his hand."

Riowag's answer to my words was a sign to his band. I was immediately raised up by four black warriors who placed

me on their shoulders and carried me off in the tracks of their captain, who marched with a solemn air in the direction of the Frankish camp.

At the moment when the barbarians raised me on their shoulders, I overheard one of those who wished to flay me alive say to one of his companions in a mocking tone:

"Riowag is Elwig's lover; he wishes to make a present of the prisoner to his mistress."

These words enabled me to realize that Riowag, the captain of the band of black warriors, being the lover of the priestess Elwig, gallantly made her a present of my person, just as in our country bridegrooms offer a dove or a sheep to the young girl whom they love.

You will be astonished, my child, to find in this narrative that I have used words that sound almost droll in describing events that were so threatening to my life. Do not imagine that this is due to the circumstance that at the hour when I write these lines, I had escaped all danger. No. Even when the danger was most imminent—a danger from which I was almost miraculously delivered—I had full control of my spirit, and the old Gallic sense of humor, a thing so natural to our race, however long it lay torpid under the weight of the shame and the trials of slavery, revived in me as it did with so many others when we once more tasted the boon of freedom. The observations that you will encounter, and which I have reproduced as they occurred to me at times when death seemed inevitable, were sincere, they proceeded from my faith in that belief of our fathers that man never dies, that when he leaves this world he enters others in which he proceeds to live.

Carried upon the shoulders of the four black warriors, I

traversed a section of the Frankish camp. The vast bivouac which was arranged without order, consisted of huts for the chiefs and tents for the soldiers. It was a sort of gigantic village of savages. Here and there lay their innumerable war chariots sheltered under rude sheds made of the trunks of trees. Their indefatigable small, lean, rough-coated and shaggy-maned horses, that they managed with a halter of cord for only bridle, were, as is the custom with these barbarians, tied to the wheels of the chariots or to the trunks of trees, the bark of which they gnawed at. The Franks themselves, barely clad in skins of animals, their hair and beard greasy with suet, presented an aspect that was repulsive, stupid and ferocious. Some of them were stretched out at full length in the warm rays of that sun that they started in search of from the depths of their dark northern forests. Others found amusement in the hunt for vermin over their hairy bodies; these barbarians lived in such filth that, although they were in the open air, their encampment exhaled a fetid odor.

At the sight of these undisciplined hordes, ill armed but innumerable, and whose forces were incessantly recruited by fresh migrations that poured down in mass from the glacial regions of the north to swoop upon the fertile and laughing fields of our Gaul as upon a prey, certain words of sinister omen that escaped the lips of Victoria came to my mind. Nevertheless supreme contempt speedily filled me for those barbarians, who, three or four times superior to our own armies in point of numbers, never had been able, despite many a bloody battle delivered for a number of years, to invade our soil, but found themselves every time driven back to the other side of the Rhine, our natural frontier.

While crossing a section of the encampment on the shoulders of the four black warriors who carried me, I was pursued by insults, threats and cries for my blood from the Franks who saw me pass. Several times was the escort that accompanied me obliged, upon orders from Riowag, to use their arms in order to prevent my being slain on the spot.

Thus we arrived at last near a thick wood. I observed in passing a large and more carefully constructed hut than the others, before which a yellow and red banner was planted. A large number of horsemen clad in bearskins, some in the saddle, others on foot near their mounts and leaning on their long lances, were posted around the habitation, thereby indicating clearly enough that it was occupied by one of the leading chiefs of their hordes. Again I sought to persuade Riowag, who now marched beside me, but still grave, silent and solemn, to conduct me first to that one of the chiefs whose banner I saw, after which, I said to him, they might kill me if they so pleased. My requests were vain. We entered the thick wood, and arrived at a large clearing, to the center of which I was taken. At a little distance I noticed a natural grotto, formed of large blocks of grey rock, from between which saplings and stately chestnut trees shot upwards. A stream of living water that trickled over the ledges of rock fell into a sort of natural basin. Not far from the cavern stood a brass pan, rather narrow and of about the length of a man. The opening or mouth of the infernal caldron was furnished with a net of iron chains. The latter was undoubtedly meant to keep the victim, who was thrown in to be boiled alive, from jumping out. Four large boulders supported the pan, under which a bundle of large logs of kindling wood lay ready. Human bones, bleached and strewn hither

and thither over the ground, imparted to the spot the appearance of a charnel house. Finally, in the center of the clearing, rose a colossal statue; it was surmounted with three heads rudely carved with axes and adjusted to the enormous tree-trunk that, though shapeless, was intended to represent a gigantic body. The aspect of the statue was grotesque and repulsive.

Riowag made a sign to the four black warriors who carried me to stop and deposit me at the foot of the statue. He thereupon entered the grotto alone while the warriors of the escort called out aloud:

"Elwig! Elwig!"

"Elwig! Priestess of the underground gods!"

"Rejoice, Elwig, we bring you a prisoner for your caldron!"

"You will now be able to prophesy to us!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE PRIESTESS ELWIG.

I expected to see some hideous old hag; I was mistaken. Elwig was young, tall and endowed with savage beauty. Her grey eyes, shielded under a pair of naturally reddish eyebrows of the same color as her hair, glistened like the steel of the long knife that she was armed with. Her eagle-beaked nose and high forehead imparted to her an aspect at once savage and imposing. She was clad in a long tunic of a somber hue. Her bare neck and arms were heavily laden with copper necklaces and bracelets, that clinked upon one another as she walked, and upon which she cast coquetish glances as she approached me. On her thick reddish hair, that fell upon and parted on both sides of her shoulders, she wore a scarlet coif that was a ridiculous imitation of the charming headgear used by the women of Gaul. In short, I thought I noticed in the strange creature the evidence of that mixture of puerile pride and vanity so peculiar to barbarous peoples.

Standing a few paces from her, Riowag seemed to contemplate the priestess with profound admiration. Despite his black dye and the red tattoo under which his face disappeared, his features seemed to me to betoken a violent love, and his eyes sparkled with joy when, twice in succession, pointing at me, Elwig turned her face to her lover with a smile upon her lips, in token, no doubt, of thankfulness for the offering that he brought her. I also noticed on the bare

arms of the infernal priestess two tattoo marks that brought back to my mind some reminiscences of the war we had been waging with the Franks.

One of the two marks represented two talons of a bird of prey; the other, a red serpent.

With her knife in her hand, Elwig again turned towards me and fastened her large grey eyes upon me with ferocious satisfaction, while the black warriors contemplated her with looks of fear and superstition.

"Woman," I said to the priestess, "I came here unarmed, an oak branch in my hand, and bearing a message of peace to the grand chiefs of your hordes.—I was fallen upon and bound fast.—I am in your power—you can kill me—if such be your pleasure—but before you do, have me presented to one of your chiefs.—The interview that I request is of as much importance to the Franks as to the Gauls. It is Victorin himself and his mother Victoria the Great who have sent me hither."

"You are sent by Victoria?" cried the priestess with a singular air. "Victoria, who is said to be so very beautiful?"

"Yes, I am sent by her who is called the Mother of the Camps."

Elwig reflected, and after a long silence she raised her hands over her head, brandished her knife, and pronounced some mysterious words in a voice that sounded at once threatening and inspired. Thereupon she motioned to the black warriors to retire.

They all obeyed, walking slowly back towards the thicket that surrounded the clearing.

Only Riowag remained a few steps from the priestess. Turning towards him she pointed with an imperious gesture

towards the wood in which the other black warriors had disappeared. Seeing that the captain did not obey her summons, she raised her voice, and again pointed to the wood.

Riowag then obeyed and left in turn.

I remained alone with the priestess. I was left bound, lying at the foot of the statue of the under gods. Elwig squatted down upon her haunches near me and asked:

"You were sent by Victoria to speak with the Frankish chiefs?"

"I said so before."

"You are one of Victoria's officers?"

"I am one of her soldiers."

"Does she cherish you?"

"She is my foster-sister, I am as a brother to her."

These words seemed to cause Elwig to reflect anew. She remained silent for a while, and then resumed:

"Would Victoria weep over your death?"

"As one would weep over the death of a faithful servant."

"She surely would give much to save your life?"

"Is it ransom you want?"

Elwig again relapsed into silence, and resumed with a mixture of embarrassment and cunning that struck me forcibly:

"Let Victoria come and ask my brother for your life. He will grant it to her.—But listen, Victoria has a great reputation for beauty; handsome women love to deck themselves with the Gallic jewelry that is so celebrated.—Victoria must have superb ornaments, seeing she is the mother of the chief of your country.—Tell her to cover herself with her richest jewelry; it will please my brother's eyes.—He will be all the more gracious, and will grant your life to her."

I immediately surmised the snare that the priestess of hell

was laying for me with the clumsy cunning natural to barbarians. Wishing to make certain, I observed without referring to her last words:

"It seems that your brother is a powerful chief."

"He is more than a chief," Elwig answered proudly; "he is a king."

"We also, in the days of our barbarism, had kings. What is your brother's name?"

"Neroweg, surnamed the Terrible Eagle."

"You carry on your arms two figures, one representing a red serpent, the other the talons of a bird of prey. What do those emblems mean?"

"The fathers of our fathers in our royal family have always worn these signs of valor and subtlety. The eagle's talons denote valor; the serpent subtlety. But let us drop my brother," added Elwig with somber impatience. My digression seemed to displease her. "Will you induce Victoria to come here?"

"One word more on your royal brother.—Does he not carry on his forehead the identical symbols that you carry on your arms?"

"Yes," she replied with increasing impatience. "Yes, my brother carries an eagle's talon over each eye-brow, and the red serpent on a head-band over his forehead. Kings wear a head-band. But we have spoken enough of Neroweg—quite enough—"

I thought I noticed on Elwig's features an ill dissembled sentiment of hatred when she pronounced his name. She proceeded:

"If you do not wish to die, write to Victoria to come to our camp ornamented with her most precious jewels. She

shall repair alone to a place that I shall designate to you—a secluded spot that I know—I shall come for her and shall lead her to my brother to solicit your life from him—"

"Victoria to come alone to this camp?—I have come hither, relying upon the sacredness of the truce;—I carried the bough of peace in my hand, and yet one of my companions was killed, another was wounded, and to cap the climax of treachery, I am delivered to you bound hand and foot to be put to death—"

"Victoria may bring a small escort with her."

"Which would be unquestionably massacred by your men! —The scheme is too transparent!"

"You, then, wish to die!" cried the priestess gnashing her teeth in actual or simulated rage, and threatening me with her knife. "The fire will be shortly kindled under the caldron.—I shall have you plunged alive into the magic water, and you shall boil in it until you are dead.—Once more, and for the last time, make your choice.—Either you shall die in tortures, or you will write to Victoria to repair to our camp decked in her richest ornaments!—Choose!" she added with redoubled fury and again threatening me with her knife. "Choose—or you die!"

I knew there was no more thievish, covetous or vainglorious race than this breed of Franks. I noticed that Elwig's large grey eyes glistened with cupidity every time she mentioned the magnificent ornaments, that, as she imagined, the Mother of the Camps surely possessed. The ridiculous accoutrement of the priestess; the profusion of valueless gewgaws that she wore with a savage woman's coquetry, in order, no doubt, to appear pleasing to the eye of Riowag, the captain of the black warriors; above all, her persistence in demanding of me that

Victoria come to the Frankish camp covered with rich jewels; —everything justified the conclusion that Elwig aimed at drawing my foster-sister into an ambush in order to slay her and rob her of her jewels. The clumsy scheme did not do credit to the ingenuity of the priestess of the nether regions. Nevertheless, her cupidity might be turned to my service. I answered her in a tone of indifference:

"Woman, you mean to kill me if I do not induce Victoria to come here? You are free to kill me—boil my flesh and bones —you will thereby lose more than you think for, seeing that you are the sister of Neroweg, the Terrible Eagle, one of the greatest kings of all your hordes!"

"What would I lose?—"

"Magnificent Gallic ornaments!"

"Ornaments!—What ornaments?" cried Elwig doubtfully, although her eyes snapped with greed.

"Do you imagine that, in sending her foster-brother to convey a message to the kings of the Franks, Victoria the Great did not prepare, as a pledge of truce, rich presents for the wives and sisters who accompany them, and for those whom they left behind in Germany?"

Elwig leaped to her feet with one bound, hurled her knife away, clapped her hands, and emitted loud peals of laughter that sounded like a crazy woman's transports. Thereupon she crouched down again beside me, and said in a voice broken with childish breathlessness:

"Presents? You bring presents with you?—Where are they?"

"Yes, I bring with me presents fit to dazzle an empress— gold necklaces studded with carbuncles, ear pendants of pearls and rubies, gold bracelets, belts and crowns that are so loaded

with precious stones that they glitter in all the colors of the rainbow.—All these masterpieces of our most skilled Gallic goldsmiths I have brought with me for presents.—And seeing that your brother Neroweg, the Terrible Eagle, is the most powerful king of all your hordes, the bulk of all those riches —those bracelets, those necklaces and other jewels—would have fallen to you."

Elwig listened to me open-mouthed, her hands clasped together, without endeavoring to hide either the admiration or unbridled greed that the enumeration of such treasures kindled in her breast. Suddenly, however, her features assumed an expression of mingled doubt and anger. She rose, ran to her knife, and returning with it in her hands, raised it over me crying:

"You either lie, or you are mocking me!—Where are those treasures?"

"In a safe place.—I foresaw that I might be killed and plundered before I was able to fulfil the orders of Victoria and her son."

"Where did you put that treasure in safety?"

"It remained in the bark that brought me to this side of the river.—My companions rowed back from the shore and cast anchor beyond the reach of the arrows of your hordes."

"We also have barks moored at the other end of the camp. I shall order your companions to be pursued—I shall have the treasures!"

"You deceive yourself!—As soon as my companions see the enemy's barks approach from a distance, they will suspect foul play. Seeing that they have a long lead, they will be able to regain the opposite shore of the Rhine without any danger whatever.—Such will be the only fruit of the treach-

ery practiced by your people upon me.—Come, woman! Have me boiled for your infernal auguries! Perhaps my bones, bleached in your caldron, may be transformed into magnificent ornaments!"

"I want the treasures!" replied Elwig struggling against her lingering suspicions. "Since you did not carry the jewels about you, when would you have given them to the kings of our hordes?"

"When I left the jewels in the bark I expected I would be received as an envoy of peace, and that as such I would be escorted back to the river bank. My companions would then have returned to the shore to receive me, and I would have taken the presents out of the bark and distributed them among the kings in the name of Victoria and her son."

The priestess looked upon me for a while with darkling eyes. She seemed to yield alternately to mistrust and to the promptings of cupidity. Finally, however, the latter sentiment evidently prevailed. She took a few steps away, and with a strong voice pronounced the bizarre name of a person who was not until then upon the scene.

Almost instantly a hideous old hag with grey hair and clad in a blood-bespattered robe issued from the cavern. She was, no doubt, the active priestess at the inhuman sacrifices. She exchanged a few words in a low voice with Elwig and forthwith vanished in the surrounding wood, in the direction that the black warriors had followed.

Again dropping on her haunches beside me, the priestess said in a low and muffled voice:

"Since you wish to speak with my brother, King Neroweg, I have sent for him.—He will soon be here—but you shall not mention a word to him concerning the jewels."

"Why keep him in the dark concerning them?"

"Because he would keep them to himself."

"What!—He!—Your own brother!—Would he not share the jewels with you, his sister?"

A bitter smile contracted Elwig's lips. She resumed:

"My brother came near cutting off my arm with a blow of his axe a few weeks ago, simply because I merely wished to touch part of his booty."

"Is that the way brothers and sisters behave towards one another among the Franks?"

"Among the Franks," Elwig answered with a face of deepening rancor, "the mother, sister and wives of a warrior are his first slaves."

"His wives!—Has he, then, several?"

"As many as he can capture and feed—the same as he has as many horses as he can buy."

"What! Does not a sacred and eternal union join the husband to the mother of his children, as with us Gauls?—What! Sisters, wives and mothers—all are slaves? Blessed of the gods is Gaul, my own country, where our mothers and wives, venerated by all, proudly take their seat in the nation's councils and where their advice, often wiser than that of their husbands and sons, not infrequently prevails."

Palpitating with cupidity, Elwig made no answer to me, and resumed the thread of her dominant thoughts.

"You will, accordingly, not mention the jewels to Neroweg. He would keep them all for himself. You will wait until it is dark to leave the camp. I shall accompany you. You will give me the jewels, all the presents—to me alone!"

And again bursting into almost insane peals of laughter, she added:

"Gold bracelets! Necklaces of pearls! Ear pendants studded with rubies! Diadems full of precious stones! I shall look grand as an empress! Oh, how beautiful I shall be in the eye of Riowag!"

Elwig thereupon cast disdainful glances at the copper bracelets that she rattled as she shook her arms, and repeated:

"I shall look very beautiful to Riowag!"

"Woman," I said to her, "your advice is prudent. We shall have to wait until it is night for us to leave the camp together and regain the river bank."

And, to the end of still further enlisting Elwig's confidence in me by seeming to take an interest in her vainglorious greed, I added:

"But if your brother sees you decked with such magnificent ornaments, will he not take them away from you?"

"No," she promptly answered with a strange and sinister look. "No, he will not take them!"

"If Neroweg the Terrible Eagle is of as violent a temperament as you claim, if he came near cutting off your arm for having wished merely to touch part of his booty," I suggested, surprised at her answer, and anxious to fathom her thoughts, "what will prevent your brother from seizing the jewels?"

Elwig held up to me her large knife with an expression of calm ferocity that made me shiver, as she answered:

"When I shall have the treasure—to-night, I shall enter my brother's hut—I shall share his bed, as usual—and when he is asleep I shall kill him—"

"Your own brother!" I cried with a shudder and hardly believing what I heard, although the insight that the priestess gave into the shocking immorality prevalent among the

Franks was nothing new to me. "How! You share your own brother's bed?"

The priestess seemed no wise disconcerted by my question, and answered with a somber mien:

"I have shared my brother's bed since the day that he violated me. It is the fate of almost all the sisters of the Frankish kings who follow them in war. Did I not tell you that their wives, their sisters and their mothers are the first slaves of the warriors? What female slave is there who, willingly or unwillingly, does not share her master's bed?"

"Hold your tongue, woman!" I cried interrupting her. "Hold your tongue! Your monstrous words might draw a thunderbolt upon our heads!"

And without being able to add another word I contemplated the creature with horror. Such a mixture of debauchery, greed, barbarism and, withal, stupid frankness, seeing that Elwig unbosomed herself to me, a man whom she then saw for the first time in her life, upon her fratricidal intentions—that fratricide, preceded by incest, which this priestess of a sanguinary cult was subjected to and who shared her brother's bed while she at the same time surrendered herself to another man—all that filled me with horror, notwithstanding I had often heard accounts of the abominable morals of the barbarians beyond the Rhine.

Elwig seemed not to concern herself about the cause of my silence nor of the evident disgust that she filled me with. She mumbled some unintelligible words, and counted the copper bracelets that her arms were loaded with. She presently said to me pensively:

"Do you think I shall have nine fine bracelets studded with precious stones to replace these? Could they all go into a

little bag that I shall keep concealed under my robe when I return to the hut of the king, my brother? Why do you not answer my questions?"

The cold, I should almost say naïve, ferocity of the woman redoubled the disgust that the monster inspired in me. Again I remained silent, and she cried aloud:

"Why do you not answer me? You promised me the jewels!"

But seeming to be suddenly struck by a new thought she added with terror:

"I told him all! Suppose he tells it all again to Neroweg! My brother would kill us both, me and Riowag! The thought of the treasure bereft me of my senses!"

And again she started to call, turning her face towards the cavern.

A second old hag, no less hideous than the first, hobbled out holding in her hand the bone of an ox from which hung a partly boiled shred of meat at which she gnawed with her toothless gums.

"Come quick to me," the priestess said to her, "and leave your bone there."

The old hag obeyed unwillingly, grumbling like a dog whose meat is taken away from him. She laid the bone on one of the projecting rocks at the entrance of the grotto, and drew near, wiping her lips.

"Gather some dry, good branches and roots of trees and kindle a fire with them under the brass caldron," the priestess said to the old woman.

The latter returned into the cavern, and brought out all the things that she was ordered. Soon a bright fire burned under the caldron.

"Now," Elwig said to the old woman, pointing her finger at me as I lay stretched out upon the earth at the feet of the statue of the subterranean deity, with my hands pinioned behind my back and my feet bound fast, "kneel down upon him."

I could make not the slightest motion. The old hag planted herself on her knees upon my breast-plate, and said to the priestess:

"What must I do next?"

"Make him put out his tongue."

I then understood that, carried away at first by her savage greed into making dangerous confidences to me, Elwig now reproached herself for having heedlessly mentioned her amours and her fratricidal intentions, and could think of no better way to compel my silence on these subjects towards her brother than to cut off my tongue. The project was more easily conceived than it could be executed. I clenched my teeth with all my might.

"Tighten your fingers on his throat!" Elwig commanded the hag. "He will then open his mouth and stick his tongue out. I shall then cut it off."

With her knees firmly planted upon my cuirass, the hag leaned forward so close to me that her hideous face almost touched mine. I shut my eyes with disgust. Presently I felt the crooked yet nervous fingers of the priestess' assistant tighten at my throat. For a while I struggled against suffocation and did not unlock my teeth; but, as Elwig had foreseen, I soon felt almost smothered and unconsciously opened my mouth. Elwig immediately thrust in her fingers in order to seize my tongue. I bit her so savagely that she withdrew her hand screaming with pain. At that moment I saw the black warriors and Riowag reissue from the wood whither

they had withdrawn at the priestess' orders. Riowag approached on a run, but he stopped undecided what to do at the sight of a troop of Franks who arrived from the opposite side and stepped into the clearing. One of these called out in a hoarse and imperious voice:

"Elwig! Elwig!"

"The king, my brother!" gasped the priestess, who was on her knees beside me.

It seemed to me that she looked for the knife that she had dropped during her struggle with me.

"Fear not! I shall be dumb. You shall have the treasure all for yourself," I whispered to Elwig, fearing lest, in her terror, the woman plunge the knife into my throat. I sought to secure her support at all hazard, and to contrive a means of escape by inciting her cupidity.

Whether Elwig trusted my word, or whether her brother's presence stayed her hand, she cast a significant glance at me, and remained on her knees at my side, with her head drooping upon her chest as if absorbed in revery. The old hag having risen to her feet, my breast-plate was relieved of her weight; I could again breathe freely; and I saw the Terrible Eagle standing before me, escorted by several other Frankish kings, as the chiefs of those marauding hordes styled themselves.

CHAPTER V.

NEROWEG THE TERRIBLE EAGLE.

The Frankish chief who stood before me was a man of colossal stature. Due to the use of lime-water, his beard as well as his greasy hair, that rose in a knot over his forehead, had turned coppery red. His hair, tied with a leather thong on the top of his head, fell behind his shoulders like the flowing crest of a casque. Above each of his bushy red eyebrows I saw an eagle's talon tattooed in blue, while another scarlet tattoo mark, representing the undulations of a serpent, spanned his forehead. His left cheek was also ornamented with a red and blue tattoo that consisted of transverse rays. On his right cheek, however, the savage ornament disappeared almost wholly in the cavity of a deep scar that began below the eye and was finally lost under his shaggy beard. Heavy and coarsely-wrought gold medals, that hung from and distended his ears, dropped upon his shoulders. A heavy silver chain, wound three times around his neck, reached down to his semi-bare breast. Above his cloth tunic he wore a jacket of some animal's hide. His hose, of the same quality and as soiled as his tunic, were fastened by a leather belt from which, on one side, hung a long sword, on the other an axe of sharp stone. Wide strips of tanned skin criss-crossed upward over his hose, from the ankle to the knees. He leaned upon a short pike that ended in a sharp point. The other kings who accompanied Neroweg were

tattooed, clad and armed more or less after the same fashion. The features of all bore the stamp of savage gravity.

Elwig, who remained on her knees at my side, sought to conceal her face from Neroweg. He rudely touched his sister's shoulder with the point of his pike, and addressed her harshly:

"Why did you send for me before boiling the Gallic dog for your auguries? My flayers have promised me his skin."

"The hour is not favorable," answered the priestess abruptly with a mysterious air. "The hour of night—of dark night is preferable to sacrifice to the gods of the nether world. The Gaul, moreover, says, oh mighty king, that he has a message from Victoria and her son."

Neroweg drew nearer and looked at me. At first his mien was one of disdainful indifference; presently, however, as he examined me more attentively, his features assumed an expression of hatred and of triumphant rage; at last he cried as if he could not believe his own eyes:

"It is he! He is the horseman of the bay steed! It is himself!"

"Do you know him?" Elwig asked her brother. "Do you know this prisoner?"

"Off with you!" was Neroweg's brusque answer. "Get you gone!"

He then proceeded to contemplate me with renewed interest and repeated:

"Yes, it is he; the horseman of the bay steed!"

"Did you ever meet him in battle?" again asked Elwig. "Answer me. Do answer me!"

"Will you be gone!" repeated Neroweg now raising his pike over the head of the priestess. "I told you before, be gone!"

My eyes at that moment caught sight of the group of black warriors. I saw that their captain Riowag could hardly be restrained by his men from drawing his sword, and revenging the insult offered to Elwig by Neroweg.

But so far from obeying her brother, and no doubt fearing that in her absence I might reveal to the Terrible Eagle both her own fratricidal projects and the secret of Victoria's presents which she coveted, Elwig cried:

"No! No! I remain here! The prisoner belongs to me for my auguries. I shall not go away. I shall keep him—"

The only answer that Neroweg vouchsafed his sister were several blows with the handle of his pike, delivered over her back. He thereupon made a sign, and several of the warriors who accompanied him violently drove the priestess, together with the haggish old assistant, back into the cavern at the mouth of which they posted themselves on guard, sword in hand.

The black warriors who surrounded Riowag were put to their mettle in order to prevent their captain from precipitating himself with drawn sword upon the Terrible Eagle. The latter, thinking only of me, failed to notice the fury of his rival, and addressed me in a voice trembling with rage, while he kicked me with his feet:

"Do you recognize me, dog?"

"I recognize you, rapacious wolf."

"This wound," resumed Neroweg carrying his finger to the deep scar that furrowed his cheek, "do you know who made this wound?"

"Yes, it is my handiwork. I fought you as a soldier."

"You lie! You fought me like a coward! You were two against one!"

"You were making a furious onset on the son of Victoria the Great. He was wounded—his hand could hardly hold his sword—I dashed to his help—and struck in Gallic fashion."

"You marked my face with your Gallic sword—dog!"

Saying this Neroweg struck me repeatedly with the handle of his pike, to the great amusement of the other kings.

I remembered my ancestor Guilhern, chained like a slave and supporting with dignity the cruel treatment of the Romans after the battle of Vannes. I emulated his example. I merely said to Neroweg:

"You are striking an unarmed soldier who is bound fast and who, relying upon the truce, came to you on an errand of peace—that is a coward's act. You would not dare to raise your stick at me if I stood on my feet and sword in hand."

The Frankish chief laughed, struck me again and said:

"He is a fool who, able to kill his enemy disarmed, does not exterminate him. I would like to kill you twice over. You are doubly my enemy. I hate you because you are a Gaul, I hate you because your race holds Gaul, the country of sunshine, of good wine and beautiful women; then also I hate you because you marked my face with a wound that is my eternal shame. I shall therefore make you suffer so much that your pain will be equal to two deaths, a thousand deaths, if I only could—you Gallic dog!"

"The Gallic dog is a noble animal for war and for the hunt," I replied to him; "the Frankish wolf, however, is an animal of rapine and carnage. But it will not be long before the brave Gallic dogs will have chased from their frontiers this pack of voracious wolves that have come prowling from the northern forests. Be careful! If you refuse to

listen to the message that I have for you from Victoria and her valiant son—be careful! Our army is numerous. It will be a war to the death that will be waged between the Gallic dog and the Frankish wolf—a war of extermination—and the Frankish wolf will be devoured by the Gallic dog."

Grinding his teeth with rage, Neroweg seized the axe that hung from his belt, and raising it in both hands was about to let it come crashing down upon my head. I believed my last hour had come, but two of the other kings held the arm of Elwig's brother, into whose ears they whispered a few words that seemed to calm him. He held a short conference with his companions and returned to me:

"What is the message that you bring from Victoria for the Frankish kings?"

"The messenger of Victorin and Victoria can only speak on his feet, unfettered, his head high—not stretched down on the ground, and bound fast like the ox that expects the butcher's knife. Order my bonds to be removed, and I shall speak—if not, not. You have heard me, brute that you are!"

"Speak on the spot—unconditionally, you Gallic dog!—or tremble before my anger!"

"No; I shall not speak!"

"I shall know how to make you speak!"

"Try it! You will find me unshakeable!"

Neroweg ordered one of the other kings to fetch a firebrand from under the brass caldron. I was held down by the shoulders and feet, so as to prevent me from making the slightest motion, while the Terrible Eagle placed the firebrand upon my iron cuirass and heaped up others about it. The brasier that he thus built upon my body seemed to amuse him greatly. He laughed out aloud and said to me:

"You shall speak, or be broiled like a tortoise in its shell."

The iron of my cuirass soon began to heat under the coals which two of the Frankish kings kept alive by blowing upon them. I suffered greatly and cried:

"Oh! Neroweg! Neroweg! Cowardly assassin! I would gladly endure these tortures, if I only could see myself once more sword in hand before you, and put my mark upon your other cheek. Oh! You have said it—there is room only for hatred and death between our two races!"

"What is Victoria's message?" the Terrible Eagle asked again.

I remained silent, despite the intense pain that I suffered. The iron of my cuirass was growing hot all around.

"Will you speak?" the Frankish chief cried anew, evidently astonished at my resistance.

"Victoria's messenger speaks erect and free," I answered. "If not, not!"

Whether the Frankish chief considered it desirable to know the message that I brought, or whether he only yielded to the suggestions of his companions, who were less ferocious than himself, one of them unbuckled my casque, raised it off my head, took it to the stream that rippled down the rocks at the mouth of the cavern, filled it and poured the cold water upon my heated cuirass. By degrees it cooled off.

"Free him of his bonds," said Neroweg, "but surround him; and let him instantly fall under your blows should he try to escape."

I slowly regained my strength while I was being unbound; the torture I had just undergone almost caused me to faint. I drank some of the water that remained in my casque, and stood up in the midst of the kings, who surrounded me so as to cut off my retreat.

"Give us now your message," said Neroweg.

"A truce has been concluded between our two armies," I proceeded. "Victoria and her son send to tell you: Since you issued from your northern forests you have taken possession of the whole territory of Germany on the right bank of the Rhine. That soil is as fertile as Gaul's. Before your invasion it produced an abundance of everything. Your acts of violence and cruelty have driven almost all its inhabitants to flight. The soil, nevertheless, remains, ready and willing for the husbandman. Why do you not cultivate it, instead of waging incessant war against us and living on rapine? Is it the love for war that sways you? We Gauls, better than anyone else, understand and appreciate the love for martial display. We appreciate it, and make this proposition to you. At each new moon, send one or two thousand of your picked warriors to one of the large islands in the Rhine, which is our joint frontier. We shall expedite thither an equal number of our warriors. The two sets will be free to fight it out at their heart's content. But then, at least, you Franks, on one side of the river, and we Gauls on the other shall be able to cultivate our respective fields in peace, we shall be able to work, to manufacture and to enrich our countries, without being forever compelled to keep an eye upon the frontier, and a sword hanging from the plow handle. If you refuse our proposition we shall then wage a war of extermination against you, drive you from our frontiers, and chase you back into your forests. When two nations are separated only by a river they should be friends, or one of the two must destroy the other. Choose! I await your answer."

Neroweg consulted with several of the kings who stood

near him, and presently answered me with marked insolence:

"The Frank is not one of those races, like the Gallic, who work by cultivating the soil. The Frank loves war; but above all he loves the warmth of the sun, good wine, fine weapons, brilliant clothes, gold and silver goblets, rich necklaces, large and well built cities, superb palaces after the fashion of the Romans, the beautiful Gallic women, industrious slaves who mind the whip and work for their masters while these drink, sing, sleep and make love or war. In their gloomy country of the north, however, the Franks find neither sunshine nor good wine, nor fine weapons, nor brilliant clothes, nor gold and silver goblets, nor large and well built cities, nor superb palaces, nor beautiful Gallic women—all these things are to be found among you, Gallic dogs! We purpose and mean to take all that from you—we purpose and mean to establish ourselves in your fertile country, and enjoy all the good things that it contains, while the males of you will work for us under the whip and the sharp sword that we shall hold over you, and the females—your wives, sisters and daughters—will lie in our beds, will weave our shirts and will wash our clothes. Do you understand, Gallic dog?"

The other kings applauded Neroweg and accentuated their approval with loud laughter and clatter of arms, joined to cries of:

"Yes—that is what we want—do you understand, Gallic dog?"

"I understand," I replied, unable to refrain from indulging in raillery against such savage insolence. "I understand that you wish to conquer and subjugate us as did the Romans for a time, after our own race dominated and conquered the whole world for centuries in succession. But you

who so much love the sunshine, the goods, the country and the women of other peoples, you seem to forget that, despite the universal power that they acquired and despite their innumerable armies, even the Romans were compelled to return to us one by one the rights that we enjoyed, so that, at this hour, the Romans are no longer our conquerors, but our allies. Now, then, seeing that you so much love the sunshine, the country, the goods and wives of others, listen to my words: We, the Gauls, alone and unaided by the Romans, will chase you from our frontiers, or we shall exterminate you to the last man if you persist in being bad neighbors and in proposing to plunder us of our old Gaul."

"Yes, we are plunderers!" cried Neroweg. "And, by the snows of Germany we shall plunder you of your old Gaul! Our army is four times as large as yours; you have your palaces, your cities, your wealth, your women, your sun, your fertile earth to defend—we have nothing to defend and everything to gain. We camp in our huts and sleep on the backs of our horses; our only wealth is our sword; we have nothing to lose, everything to gain. And we will gain everything, and we will subjugate your race, you Gallic dog! It will be the end of Gaul!"

"Go and ask the Romans, whose army was even larger than yours, how many foreign cohorts the sod of old Gaul has devoured! Even the greatest battles that they, the conquerors of the world delivered, did not cost them one-quarter the number of soldiers that our fathers, as insurgent slaves, exterminated with their scythes and forks. Take care! Strong and sharp is the sword of the Gallic soldier; trenchant is the scythe, heavy the fork of the Gallic husbandman in the defense of hearth, family and freedom! Take care! If you

persist in remaining bad neighbors, the Gallic scythe and fork will be enough to drive you back into your snow-bound wilderness, ye people of sloth, of rapine and of carnage, who desire to enjoy the fruits of the labors of others, who covet their soil, their wives and their sunshine, and strive after these by means of theft and massacre!"

"Dare you, Gallic dog, hold such language to us!" cried Neroweg grinding his teeth. "You, a prisoner! You, under the points of our swords! under the edge of the Frankish battle axe!"

"The moment seems to me opportune to say the truth to the enemies of Gaul!"

"And I think the moment is opportune to put you through a thousand deaths!" cried the Frankish king in a passion as towering as that of his fellows. "Yes, you shall undergo a thousand deaths—and after that, my sole answer to the audacious message of your Victoria will be to return your head to her with the announcement in the name of Neroweg the Terrible Eagle, that, before the sun shall have risen six times, I shall capture herself in the midst of her own camp, shall take her to my bed, and shall then pass her over to my men, that they may, in turn, enjoy Victoria, the proud Gallic woman!"

I lost all control over myself at the ribald and ferocious insolence flung at the woman whom I venerated above all others. I was unarmed, but I picked up one of the now extinguished firebrands that lay at my feet and which the Franks had used to torture me with; I seized the heavy log, and swift as lightning struck Neroweg so sound a blow with it over his head that he reeled back, stumbled and fell to the ground unconscious.

Ten swords struck me almost simultaneously. But my casque and cuirass protected me. In their blind rage the Frankish chiefs struck at random, and cried:

"Death! Death to the dog of a Gaul!"

Only Riowag, the captain of the black warriors, did not join in the attempt to avenge upon my person the blow I dealt to his rival, Neroweg. On the contrary, he profited by the tumult to enter the cavern into which Elwig had been driven back, the entrance of which was now left free, seeing that the two kings, who, sword in hand, mounted guard before it, rushed to the assistance of the Terrible Eagle, who lay prostrate at a distance from them.

Immediately after Riowag entered the grotto, the priestess and her two assistant hags rushed out. With streaming hair, haggard looks, and hands raised heavenward they cried:

"The hour has come—the sun is setting—night approaches—death, death to the Gaul! He struck the Terrible Eagle—death, death to the Gaul! Bind him fast. We shall consult the subterranean gods in the magic water in which he is to boil!"

"Yes—death!" cried the Franks rushing upon me and binding me fast again. "He shall die under a prolonged agony! Death to the dog of a Gaul!"

"We are the priestesses of the sacrifice!" Elwig and the two hags protested in chorus, while they redoubled their bizarre contortions that by degrees imposed the Frankish warriors with terror.

"Oh! you who struck my brother, the blood of my blood," Elwig screamed, writhing her arms, and howling furiously she threw herself upon me in a real or feigned transport of rage; "the gods of the nether world have delivered you into

my hands! Come—come—let us drag him into the cavern," she added addressing the old hags, "we must season him for his death with the proper tortures. Vengeance! Let our vengeance be merciless!"

The confusion into which the Franks were thrown by the blow that I dealt Neroweg kept them from interfering with Elwig and her two female assistants. Several of the kings even joined her in dragging me into the cavern, while the others were hurrying hither and thither or gathered anxiously around the Terrible Eagle who lay prone upon the ground, pale, motionless and his head bleeding.

"Our grand chief is not dead," said some; "his hands are warm and his heart beats."

"Let us transport him to his hut."

"If he die we shall draw lots for his five black horses, his fine Gallic sword with the gold handle, and also for his necklace and silver bracelets."

"The horses and arms of Neroweg belong to the oldest chief!" cried one of those who were holding up the head of the Terrible Eagle. "I am the oldest. To me belong both horses and arms! To me also his tent and chariots! To me his gold necklaces and silver bracelets!"

"You lie!" came from one of the chiefs at the feet of Neroweg. "His horses, his tent and his arms belong to me as his war companion."

"No!" cried the others. "No! Everything that belongs to Neroweg must be drawn lots for."

From the threshold of the cavern where I then was, I could see and hear the dispute wax hot and the swords glisten, while Neroweg, who still remained unconscious, was almost trampled under the feet of the enraged disputants, as they

leaped over his body to get at closer quarters with one another. The conflict threatened to take a bloody turn when, leaving me where I was, Elwig threw herself between the combatants, whom she sought to separate, and shouted aloud:

"Shame and ill luck to those who contend over the spoils of a king who is neither dead nor revenged! Shame and ill luck to those who contend over the spoils of a brother before the very eyes of his sister! Shame and ill luck to the impious men who disturb the quiet of a place that is consecrated to the gods of the nether world!"

And with an inspired and dreadful mien, the priestess drew herself to her full length, and throwing up her clenched fists above her head, cried:

"My two hands are full of fearful misfortunes. Tremble!"

At these threats, the frightened barbarians involuntarily lowered their heads, as if afraid of being struck with the mysterious ills that the priestess held in her closed hands. They put their swords back into their scabbards. Profound silence ensued.

"Carry the Terrible Eagle to his hut!" Elwig thereupon commanded. "The sister will accompany her wounded brother. The Gallic prisoner will be watched by Map and Mob who assist me at the sacrifices. Two of you will remain at the mouth of the cavern, with your swords in your hands. Night is drawing near. Elwig will presently return with Neroweg. The execution of the prisoner will then begin, and I shall consult the auguries in the magic waters in which he is to boil until death supervenes!"

My last hope was dashed. In contemplating to return with her brother, Elwig must have doubtlessly renounced the project that her greed had caused her to hatch. I had pinned

my safety on that project. I was bound firmly, hands and feet. My arms were pinioned behind my back; a belt was strapped around my legs. I could hardly move a step. I slowly followed the two hags into the grotto, at the entrance of which several of the kings posted themselves, sword in hand. The deeper I penetrated the cave, all the darker it grew. After having proceeded a little way, one of the two hags said to me:

"You may lie down on the ground if you wish; the sun has gone down. While waiting for Elwig's return, my companion and I shall keep the fire alive under the caldron."

Saying this both the hags left me. I remained alone.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FLIGHT.

From the solitude and darkness in which I was left at the departure of Elwig's sacrificial assistants, I could see the mouth of the cavern at some distance. The opening grew darker and darker as dusk yielded to night. Presently the gloom became complete, relieved only, from time to time, by the flickering light that the flames of the fire, kept alive under the huge brass caldron by the two hags, occasionally cast upon the grotto's mouth.

I tried to snap my bonds. With my hands and feet free, I would have endeavored to disarm one of the Franks who guarded the issue, and, sword in hand, and protected by the darkness of the night, I would have reached the river bank guided by the sound of the rushing waves. Perhaps and notwithstanding the orders I gave him, Douarnek might not yet have rowed back to camp. But all my efforts proved futile against the bow-strings and the belt that held me fast. A muffled but increasing rumbling of feet and voices began to announce to me the arrival and assembling of a large number of people in the neighborhood of the cave. They must be doubtlessly gathering to witness my execution and listen to the auguries of the priestess.

I believed there was nothing left to me but to resign myself to my fate. I turned my last thoughts to my wife and child.

Suddenly, from the thickest of the surrounding darkness I heard the voice of Elwig two steps behind me. I started with surprise. I was certain she did not enter by the mouth of the cavern.

"Follow me," she said.

At the same moment her feverish hand seized mine and held it firmly.

"How came you here?" I asked her stupefied, with hope re-rising in my breast, and endeavoring to walk.

"The cavern has two issues," Elwig answered. "One of them is secret and known to me only. It is by that entrance that I came in, while the kings are waiting for me at the other entrance near the caldron. Come! Come! Take me to the bark where the treasure lies, where you left the necklaces, bracelets, diadems and other jewels!"

"My legs are tied," I said. "I can hardly put one foot before the other."

Elwig did not answer, but I could feel that she was cutting with her knife the leather strap and the bow-strings that bound my arms and legs. I was free!

"And your brother," I inquired, following close upon her footsteps, "has he regained consciousness?"

"Neroweg is still dazed, like a bull whom the butcher did not kill outright. He awaits in his hut the hour of your execution. I am to notify him in time. He wishes to see you suffer and die. Come, come!"

"The darkness is so intense that I can not see before me."

"Give me your hand."

"Should your brother tire of waiting," I observed as she almost dragged me along through the windings of the secret issue, "and should he enter the sacred wood with the other

chieftains and not find either you or me in the cavern, what will happen? Will they not immediately start in pursuit of us?"

"Only I know this secret issue. When they miss both you and me from the cave, my brother and the chiefs will believe that I made you descend to the gods of the nether world. They will be all the more afraid of me. Come! Come quick!"

While Elwig thus spoke I was following her through so narrow a passage that I felt myself grazing the rocks on either side. The passage seemed at first to dip down towards the bowels of the earth, but presently its ascent became so steep and difficult for my legs, still numb from their recent ligatures, that it was with difficulty I kept step with the hurrying priestess. We had been for some time in the maze of the underground cave when at last I felt the fresh air strike my face. I imagined we were about to step into the open.

"To-night, after I shall have killed my brother in revenge for his outrages upon me," Elwig explained to me in abrupt words, "I shall flee with a king whom I love. He is waiting for us outside. He is strong, brave and well armed. He will accompany us to your bark. If you deceived me, Riowag will kill you—do you hear me, Gaul? You will fall under his axe."

I was little affected by the threat—my hands were free—my only uneasiness was whether Douarnek and the bark still waited for me.

A moment later we issued out of the cavern. The stars shone so brilliant in the sky that once out of the wood in

which we still were, I was certain I would be able to see my way before me.

The priestess stopped for a moment and called:

"Riowag!"

"Riowag is here," answered a voice so close to me that I realized the chief of the black warriors was near enough to be able to touch me. Nevertheless, it was in vain that I sought to distinguish his black shape in the dark. It became clearer to me than ever before how, by rendering themselves undistinguishable in the dark, these men could not choose but be dangerous foes in a night assault or ambuscade.

"Is it far from here to the river bank?" I asked Riowag. "You must know the spot where I landed; you were the chief of the band that greeted me with a volley of arrows."

"No, we have not far to go," Riowag answered.

"Shall we have to cross the camp?" I inquired, perceiving the lights of the Frankish encampment at a little distance.

Neither of my two guides made any answer. They exchanged a few words in a low voice, each took me by an arm, and they struck into a path that led away from the camp. Soon the roar of the rushing waters of the Rhine reached our ears. We drew rapidly near the shore. Finally from the height of the embankment on which we stood, I could distinguish a bluish sheet of water across the darkness—it was the river!

"We shall now ascend the beach about two hundred feet," said Riowag; "we shall then be at the spot where you reached land under our arrows. Your bark must be only a little distance from there. If you deceived us your blood will redden the beach, and the waters of the Rhine will wash away your corpse."

"Can we call out from the bank without being heard by the outposts of the camp?" I asked the Frank.

"The wind blows off shore," Riowag answered with the sagacity of a savage. "You can freely raise your voice and call; you will not be heard at the camp, and your voice will surely travel to the middle of the stream."

Riowag walked a few steps further and then stopped.

"It is here," he said, "where you reached land; your bark must be anchored near by. I am a professional night warrior, and am able to see through the dark, but I can not distinguish your bark."

"Oh! You deceived us! You deceived us!" murmured Elwig in a subdued voice. "You will die for it!"

"It may be," I observed, "that, after having waited for me in vain, the bark may have just left its anchorage. The wind will carry my voice far; I shall call."

Saying this I raised our battle cry of rally, well known to Douarnek.

Only the sound of the waves made answer.

Doubtlessly Douarnek had followed my orders and rowed back to camp at sunset.

I uttered our war cry a second time and louder than the first.

Again the only response was the rushing of the waves.

Meaning to gain time and prepare myself for defense, I said to Elwig: "The wind blows off shore; it carries my voice to the river; but it blows back the voices that may have answered my signal. Let us listen!"

While I spoke I strained my eyes to peer through the dark and discover the weapons that Riowag was armed with. In his belt he carried a dagger; in his hand his short, broad

sword. Although he and his beloved were close to me, one on each side, I could elude them with a bound, plunge into the river, and escape by swimming. I was watching for my opportunity when suddenly the distant and rhythmic sound of oars reached my ears. My call was heard by Douarnek.

In the measure that the decisive instant approached, the suspense and uneasiness of Elwig and her companion increased. To kill me would be to renounce the possession of the treasure, which, I had clearly told them, my soldiers would deliver only at my orders. But again, to allow the latter to disembark would be to furnish me with auxiliaries and render mine the stronger side. Elwig no doubt began to realize that her greed had carried her too far. Seeing the bark draw nearer she said to me in great excitement:

"The sacredness of the Gallic word is proverbial. You owe your life to me. I hope you did not deceive me with a false promise."

That priestess of the nether world, the incestuous and bloodthirsty monster, who had meant to cut out my tongue in order to make sure of my silence, and who calmly contemplated adding fratricide to her other crimes, had saved my life moved thereto only by base greed. Nevertheless, I could not remain insensible to her appeal to Gallic faith. I almost regretted the lie I had uttered, however excusable it might be in view of the treachery that the Frankish warriors had practiced towards me. At that critical moment I was, however, bound to consider my own safety only. I jumped at Riowag, and after a violent struggle in which Elwig did not venture to take a hand, out of fear that she might wound her lover while seeking to strike me, I succeeded in disarming the warrior.

Soon as that was done I threw myself into a posture of defense with the sword in my hand and cried:

"No, I have no treasure for you, Elwig, but if you fear to return to your brother, follow me. Victoria will treat you kindly; you will not be a prisoner; I give you my word; you may rely upon the faith of a Gaul."

Both the priestess and Riowag refused to listen; breaking out into wild imprecations they made a furious rush at me. In the tussle that ensued I killed the black warrior at the moment when he sought to stab me with his dagger, and I was wounded in the hand in the attempt to wrench the knife from Elwig's grasp. I had just succeeded and thrown the weapon into the water when, attracted by the noise of the struggle, Douarnek and one of the soldiers leaped upon the shore to hasten to my help.

"Schanvoch," Douarnek said quickly to me, "we did not follow your orders and row back at sunset. We remained at our anchorage, resolved to wait for you until morning. But thinking that you might issue at some other spot than where you landed, we rowed up and down along the shore. When we saw you this morning surrounded by those black devils, our first impulse was to row straight to the bank and suffer death beside you. But I recalled your orders, and we considered that for us to be killed was to cut off your retreat. But here you are, hale and sound. Now take my advice and let us return quickly to camp. These skinners of human bodies are ill neighbors to dwell among."

While Douarnek was speaking to me, Elwig threw herself upon the corpse of Riowag and rent the air with roars of rage interspersed with sobs. However detestable the creature

was, her paroxysm of grief touched my heart. I was about to address her when Douarnek cried:

"Schanvoch, look at the torches approaching yonder!"

Saying this Douarnek pointed in the direction of the Frankish camp. Luminous streaks were seen rapidly approaching through the dark.

"Your flight has been discovered, Elwig," I said to her, and sought to tear her from her lover's corpse, which she held clasped in a close embrace and over which she moaned piteously. "Your brother has started in your pursuit—you have not a minute to lose—come!—come!—or you are lost!"

"Schanvoch," Douarnek said to me as I vainly sought to drag away Elwig, who seemed not to hear me and sobbed aloud, "the torches are carried by armed horsemen! Listen to the clanging of their weapons! Listen to the tramp of their horses! They cannot be further than six bow shots! I beached the bark in order to reach you all the quicker! We shall have barely time to put it afloat! Would you have us all killed? If that is your purpose, say so, and we shall die like brave men; but if you mean to flee, it is high time that you move!"

"It is your brother! It is death that is approaching!" I once more cried to Elwig, whom I could not bring myself to abandon without one more effort to save her. After all, she did save my life. A minute later and she would be lost.

Seeing, however, that the priestess did not answer me, I cried to Douarnek:

"Give me a hand—let us take her away by force!"

It was impossible to tear Elwig from the corpse of Riowag; she held it in a convulsive embrace; the only alterna-

tive left was to carry off both bodies. We tried it, but soon gave up the attempt.

In the meantime the Frankish horsemen were approaching so rapidly that the light of their resinous torches projected itself as far as the beach. It was too late to save Elwig. Our bark was with difficulty pushed off; I took the rudder; Douarnek and the two remaining soldiers bent vigorously to their oars.

We were still within easy bowshot from the shore when, by the light of the torches that the troops carried, we saw the first hurrying Frankish horsemen ride up. At their head I recognized Neroweg, the Terrible Eagle, distinguishable by his colossal stature. He was closely followed by several other horsemen, all shouting with concentrated rage. Neroweg drove his horse up to the animal's neck into the river. His companions did the same, while they brandished their long lances with one hand and with the other their torches, whose ruddy reflections lighted far the waters of the river and fell upon our swiftly speeding bark.

Seated near the rudder, my back was turned to the bank and I remarked sadly to Douarnek:

"The miserable creature is killed by this time."

And propelled by the three vigorous oarsmen, our bark shot through the water.

"Is that a man, a woman, or a demon that is following us?" cried Douarnek a moment later, dropping his oar and rising on his feet in order to look at the track that our bark left behind, and that was lighted by the glimmer of the distant torches that the Frankish horsemen continued to brandish even after they gave up the pursuit.

I also rose to my feet and looked in the same direction. A second later I cried:

"Stop! Do not row! It is she! It is Elwig! Douarnek, hand me an oar! I shall reach it to her! She seems to be exhausted!"

So said, so done. Fleeing from her brother and certain death, the priestess had thrown herself into the water and must have swam after us with extraordinary vigor. She seized the extremity of the oar with a convulsive grasp; two strokes of the oars backed the bark to her; and aided by one of the soldiers I was able to draw Elwig on board.

"Blessed be the gods!" I cried. "I would always have reproached myself for your death."

The priestess made no answer; she let herself down on the bench of one of the oarsmen, and shrinking into a heap with her face between her knees, remained ominously silent. The oarsmen rowed vigorously on, and from time to time I looked back at the receding river bank. The torches of the Frankish horsemen glimmered fitfully, luminous spots through the haze of the night and the vapors that rose from the river. The end of our passage drew near; we began to distinguish the lights of our own encampment on the opposite bank. Several times I addressed Elwig, but received no answer. I threw over her shoulders and her clothes, wet with the chilly waters of the Rhine, the thick night cloak of one of the soldiers. In doing this I touched one of her arms; it was feverishly warm. A stranger to all that happened in the bark, the woman did not emerge from her savage silence. As I jumped ashore I said to Neroweg's sister:

"I shall take you to-morrow to Victoria. Until then I

tender you the hospitality of my house. My wife and her sister will treat you like a friend."

She made me a sign to lead the way, and she followed. Douarnek then approached me and said in a low voice:

"If you take my advice, Schanvoch, after the she-devil, who I know not for what reason swam after you, has dried and warmed herself at your hearth, you will lock her up safely until morning. She might otherwise strangle your wife and child during the night. There is nothing more wily and ferocious than these Frankish women."

"It will be a wise precaution to take," I answered Douarnek.

And accompanied by Elwig, who, somber and silent, followed me like a specter, I proceeded homeward.

CHAPTER VII.

SHADOWS ACROSS THE PATH.

The night was far advanced. I had reached within a few steps from my house when I saw through the dark a man crouching on the sill of one of the windows. He seemed to be peeping through the shutters. I gave a start. It was the window of my wife's room.

I seized Elwig's arm and said to her in a low voice:

"Do not budge—wait—"

She stopped and stood motionless. Controlling my emotion I advanced cautiously, seeking to avoid making the sand crunch under my feet. I failed. My steps were heard; the man jumped down from the window sill and fled. I rushed after him. Thinking that I meant to leave her in the lurch, Elwig ran after me, overtook me and seized me by the arm, crying with terror:

"If I am found alone in the Gallic camp I shall be killed!"

Despite all I could do, I could not disengage myself of Elwig's hold until after the man had vanished from sight. He had too long a lead and the night was too dark for me to endeavor to catch him. Surprised and uneasy at the incident, I retraced my steps, and knocked at the door of my house.

I could hear from within the voices of my wife and her sister, who seemed uneasy at my prolonged absence. Al-

though they knew not that I had gone to the Frankish camp, they had not yet retired.

"It is I!" I cried to them. "It is I, Schanvoch!"

The door was no sooner opened than my wife, seeing me by the light that Sampso held in her hand, threw herself into my arms, saying in a tone of sweet and tender reproach:

"At last you are back! We began to feel alarmed about you, seeing you were gone since early morning."

"And we, who counted upon you for our little feast," put in Sampso; "but I suppose you met with old comrades in arms, and time passed quickly in their company."

"Yes, I suppose the conversation was strung out over battles," added Ellen still hanging on my neck, "and my dear Schanvoch forgot his wife, just a little—"

Ellen was interrupted by a cry from Sampso. She did not at first notice Elwig, who had remained in shadow near the door. At the sight, however, of the savage creature—pale, sinister and motionless—my wife's sister could not repress her surprise and involuntary fear. Ellen quickly stepped back, noticed the presence of the priestess, and gazing at me as much surprised as her sister, said:

"Schanvoch, who is that woman?"

"Why, sister," cried Sampso forgetting the presence of Elwig and looking at me more closely, "look, the sleeves of Schanvoch's blouse are red with blood—he is wounded!"

My wife grew pale, stepped quickly back to me and anxiously scanned my face.

"Calm yourself," I answered; "my wounds are slight. I concealed from you both the mission on which I was bound. I went to the camp of the Franks, our savage foes. I carried a message from Victoria."

"To the camp of the Franks!" Ellen and Sampso cried terrified. "That meant death!"

"And this is the being who saved my life," I said to my wife, pointing at Elwig, who stood motionless at the door. "I must bespeak the attention of you both in her behalf until to-morrow."

When they learned that I owed my life to the Frankish woman my wife and her sister hastened toward Elwig, moved by a simultaneous impulse of gratitude; but they almost immediately stopped short, intimidated and even frightened by the sinister and impassive countenance of Elwig, the priestess, who seemed not to see them, and whose mind probably hovered over scenes far away.

"Give her some dry clothes, those that she has on are wet," I said to my wife and her sister. "She does not understand Gallic; your thanks will be lost upon her."

"Had she not saved your life," Ellen said to me, "I would think the woman's face looks somber and threatening."

"She is a savage like the rest of her people. Get her some dry clothes, and I shall take her to the little side room, where I shall lock her up as a matter of precaution."

Sampso went into a contiguous room to fetch a tunic and mantle for Elwig, while I said to my wife:

"Did you hear any noise at the window of your room to-night, shortly before I came in?"

"None whatever—neither did Sampso; she did not leave me since evening; we both felt uneasy at your absence. But why do you ask?"

I did not then answer my wife, seeing that Sampso at that moment returned with the clothes that she had gone after. I took them, passed them over to Elwig and said to her:

"My wife and her sister offer you these clothes. Yours are wet. Is there anything else that you wish? Are you hungry, or thirsty? What would you have?"

"I want solitude," was Elwig's answer, rejecting the proffered clothes with a gesture; "I want the black night. Only that will suit me at present."

"Very well—follow me," I said to her.

Leading the way, I opened the door of a little chamber, and raising the lamp in order to light its interior, I said to the priestess:

"You see yonder couch—rest yourself, and may the gods render peaceful to you the night that you are to pass under my roof."

Elwig made no answer; she threw herself upon the couch and covered her face with her hands.

"And now," I said to my wife as I closed and locked the door, "these duties of hospitality being attended to, I burn with the desire to embrace my little Alguen."

I found you, my child, sleeping peacefully in your cradle. I covered you with kisses, that were all the sweeter to me seeing I had that very day feared never to see you again. Your mother and her sister examined and bandaged my wounds. They were slight.

While Ellen and Sampso were attending to me, I spoke to them of the man whom I had caught sight of on the window sill, and who seemed to be peeping through the shutters. They were greatly astonished at my words; they had heard no sound; they had been together since evening. While talking over the matter, Ellen said to me:

"Did you hear the news?"

"No."

"Tetrik, the Governor of Gascony and relative of Victoria, arrived this evening. The Mother of the Camps rode out on horseback to meet him. We saw him go by."

"And did Victorin accompany his mother?"

"He rode beside her. That must be the reason that we did not see him during the day."

The arrival of Tetrik gave me food for reflection.

Sampso left me alone with Ellen. It was late. Early the next morning I was to report to Victoria and her son the result of my mission to the camp of the Franks.

CHAPTER VIII.

CAPTAIN MARION.

Early in the morning I repaired to Victoria's residence. The humble house of the Mother of the Camps was reached through a long narrow path, skirted on either side by high ramparts that constituted the outer fortifications of one of the gates of Mayence. I was about twenty paces from the house when I heard behind me the following cries uttered in terror:

"Save yourself! Save yourself!"

Looking back, I saw with no little fright a two-wheeled cart dashing rapidly towards me. The cart was drawn by two horses whose driver had lost control over them.

I could jump off neither to the right nor the left of the narrow path to let the cart pass; its wheels almost grazed the opposite walls; I was still too far from Victoria's residence to hope for escape in that direction; however swiftly I might run, I would be overtaken by the horses and trampled under their hoofs long before I could have reached the door. There was nothing left for me to do but to face the runaways, and, however hopeless the prospect, to seize them by the bit and attempt to stop them. Accordingly, I rushed forward upon the animals with my hands raised. Oh! A prodigy! Hardly did I touch the horses' reins when they suddenly reared upon their haunches. It was almost as if my mere

gesture had sufficed to check their impetuous course. Happy at having escaped what seemed certain death, but aware that I was not a magician, endowed with the power to arrest a runaway team with a mere motion of my hand, I asked myself while leaping back what the cause might be of the extraordinary spectacle. I noticed that the horses still made violent efforts to proceed on their career; they reared, tugged forward and stretched out their necks, but were unable to advance, as if the cart's wheels were locked, or some superior power restrained them.

My curiosity stirred to a high pitch, I drew near, and gliding between the horses and the wall, succeeded in climbing over the dashboard of the cart whose driver I found crouching under the seat, looking more dead than alive. As the mystery seemed to deepen, my curiosity was pricked still more. I ran to the rear of the vehicle and noticed with no slight amazement that a large sized man, robust as a Hercules, was clinging to two ornamental pieces that projected from the rear of the cart. It was thanks to his weight, and to the superhuman resistance that his great strength enabled him to offer, that the team was held back.

"Captain Marion!" I cried. "I should have known as much! There is none other in the whole Gallic army able to hold back a cart going at full speed."

"Tell that fool of a driver to pull in the reins. My wrists begin to tire."

I was transmitting the orders to the driver who was beginning to recover his senses, when I saw several soldiers, on guard at Victoria's dwelling, pour out of the house attracted by the noise. They opened the yard gate and thus offered a safe exit to the cart.

"There is no longer any danger," I said to the driver; "lead your horses on. But whom does this conveyance belong to?"

"To Tetrik, the Governor of Gascony, who arrived yesterday at Mayence. He stops at Victoria's house," answered the driver, while calming down his horses.

While the cart proceeded into the yard of Victoria's residence, I walked back towards the captain to thank him for his timely aid.

Marion had left his blacksmith's anvil for the army many years previous. He was well known and generally beloved among the soldiers, as much for his heroic courage and extraordinary strength, as for his exceptional good judgment, his sound reasoning powers, the austerity of his morals, and his extreme good fellowship. He now stood on the road, and with his casque in his hand wiped the sweat off his brow. He wore a cuirass of steel scales over his Gallic blouse, and a long sword at his side. His dusty boots told of a recent and long ride on horseback. His large sunburnt face, partly covered by a thick beard that began to be streaked with grey, was open and pleasing.

"Captain Marion," I said to him, "I must thank you for having saved me from being ground under the wheels of that cart."

"I did not know it was you who ran the risk of being trampled under the hoofs of those horses like a dog! A stupid sort of a death for a brave soldier like you, Schanvoch! But when I heard that devil of a driver crying: 'Save yourself!' I surmised he was about to kill somebody and I tried to hold the cart back. Fortunately my mother endowed me

with a good pair of wrists. But where is my dear friend Eustace?" added the captain looking around.

"Whom do you refer to?"

"To a brave fellow, the old companion of my blacksmith days. Like me, he left the hammer for the lance. The fortune of war served me better than it did him. Despite his bravery, my friend Eustace has remained a simple horseman, while I have been promoted to captain. But there he is, yonder, with his arms crossed, and motionless as a signpost. Ho! Eustace! Eustace!"

At the call, the companion of Captain Marion approached slowly, with his arms crossed over his breast. He was a man of middle size and vigorous frame. His pale blonde hair and beard, his bilious complexion, his harsh and sullen physiognomy offered a striking contrast to the pleasant exterior of the captain. I asked myself what singular affinity could draw two men of such different appearance, and doubtless also such dissimilar characters, into close and constant friendship.

"How is that, friend Eustace," the captain jokingly remarked to him, "you remain yonder looking at me with crossed arms, while I am engaged in holding back a runaway team?"

"You are strong," Eustace answered; "what aid can the flesh-worm bring to the bull?"

"That man is certainly consumed with jealousy and hatred," I thought to myself at hearing the answer and observing the sullen looks of the captain's friend.

"There is no flesh-worm nor bull in the case, my friend Eustace," answered the captain with his habitual joviality and looking rather flattered by the comparison; "but when

the flesh-worm and the bull are comrades, then, however strong the latter may be, or small the former, the one does not forsake the other—union makes strength, says the proverb."

"Captain," answered the soldier with a bitter smile, "did I ever forsake you in the hour of danger? Have I not always fought at your side, since we left the forge together?"

"I bear witness to the truth of that," cried Marion cordially, taking Eustace by the hand. "As true as the sword you carry is the last weapon I forged in order to give you a token of friendship, as it is engraved on the blade, you have ever in battle 'marched in my shadow,' as the saying goes in my country."

"What is there strange about that?" replied the soldier. "Beside you, so brave and robust, I was what the shadow is to the body."

"By the devil! Look at the shadow! My friend Eustace!" the captain exclaimed and laughed, and addressing me he added pointing at his companion Eustace:

"Let me have two or three thousand shadows like that, and the first battle that we fight on the other side of the Rhine, I shall bring back a herd of Frankish prisoners."

"You are a captain of renown! I, like so many other poor waifs, are good only to obey, to fight and to be killed. We are only meat for battles," replied the old blacksmith with an envious look and his lips slightly losing their color.

"Captain," I said to Marion, "I presume you wish to see Victorin and his mother?"

"Yes, I have a report to render to Victorin of a journey that my friend and I have just made."

"I followed you as a soldier," Eustace said; "the name of

an obscure horseman must not be remembered before Victoria the Great."

The captain shrugged his shoulders with impatience and jokingly shook his enormous fist at his friend.

"Captain," I insisted, addressing Marion, "let us hasten to Victoria. I should have been with her since dawn. I am late."

"Friend Eustace," Marion said, starting to walk with me toward Victoria's residence, "will you stay here, or wait for me at our lodging?"

"I shall wait here at the door—that is a subaltern's place."

"Would you believe it, Schanvoch," Marion replied laughing, "would you believe that it is nearly twenty years that lad and I live together and quarrel like two brothers? He will not forget that I am a captain, and will not treat me as a simple anvil-beater, as he formerly used to."

"I am not the only one, Marion, to realize the difference there is between us," Eustace answered. "You are one of the most renowned captains in the army—I am only one of the least of its soldiers."

Saying this Eustace sat down on a stone near the door, and bit his nails.

"He is incorrigible," the captain remarked to me; and we two entered the house of Victoria.

"Captain Marion must be strangely blinded by friendship," I thought to myself, "to fail to perceive that his companion is consumed with malevolent jealousy."

The residence of the Mother of the Camps was extremely simple. Captain Marion having asked one of the soldiers on guard whether Victorin could receive him, the soldier answered that he could give him no information on that head,

seeing that the young general had not spent the night in the house.

Despite the camp life, Marion preserved great austerity of morals. He seemed shocked to learn that Victorin had not yet returned home, and he cast a dissatisfied look at me. I wished to excuse Victoria's son, and said to him:

"Let us not be hasty in believing evil. Tetrik, the Governor of Gascony, arrived yesterday at the camp. It may be that Victorin spent the night in conference with him."

"So much the better. I would like to see that young man, who to-day is chief of the Gauls, free himself from the claws of that pest of profligacy that drives so many of us to evil deeds. As to myself, the moment I see a woman's bonnet or a short skirt, I turn my head away as if I saw the devil in person."

"Victorin improves, and he will improve still more with ripening years," I replied to the captain. "But what can we do—he is young—he loves pleasure—and pretty girls."

"I also love pleasure, and furiously, too!" exclaimed the good captain. "There is nothing that I delight more in, when my duties are done, than to enter my lodging and empty a pot of cool beer with my friend Eustace, while we chat over our old trade, or entertain ourselves furbishing our weapons and good armor. Those are real pleasures! And notwithstanding all the excitement that one finds in them, they are absolutely honorable. Let us hope, Schanvoch, that Victorin may some day prefer them to his immodest and diabolical orgies with the pretty girls, that scandalize us."

"I am of your opinion, captain; hope is better than despair. But in the absence of Victorin you may confer with his mother. I shall notify her of your arrival."

Saying this I left Marion alone, and passing into a neighboring apartment, encountered a serving-girl who led me to Victoria, the Mother of the Camps, my foster-sister.

CHAPTER IX.

VICTORIA THE GREAT.

I wish, my son, for your benefit and the benefit of our descendants, to trace here the portrait of that illustrious Gallic woman, one of the purest glories of our country.

I found Victoria seated beside the cradle of her grandson Victorinin, a handsome boy of two who lay profoundly asleep. Victoria had some needlework in her hands, and was busy sewing, agreeable to her custom as a good housekeeper. She was then, like myself, thirty-eight years of age, but she would have been hardly taken for thirty. In her youth she was appropriately compared to Diana, the huntress. In her mature years she was no less appropriately compared to the antique Minerva. Tall, well built, and virile, without thereby forfeiting the chaste graces of womanhood, she was magnificently shaped. Her beautiful face, instinct with a grave yet gentle expression, bore the impress of majesty under the crown of black hair which she wore in two braids coiled over her august forehead. Sent when still a little girl to a college of our venerated female druids, and having taken at the age of fifteen the mysterious vows that bound her indissolubly to the sacred religion of our fathers, she ever since, and although married, preserved the black garb of the female druids, which was also the habitual garb of the matrons of old Gaul. Her long wide sleeves, open up to the elbows, ex-

posed a pair of arms as white and as strong as those of the valiant Gallic women, who, as you will see in our family narratives, my son, heroically fought the Romans at the battle of Vannes under the eyes of our grandmother Margarid, and preferred death to the disgraces of slavery.

In the middle of the chamber, and not far from the seat occupied by the Mother of the Camps near her grandson's cradle, several rolls of parchment, together with all that was necessary for writing, lay upon a table. From the wall hung the two casques and swords of Victoria's father and husband, both killed in the same battle. One of the two casques was surmounted by the Gallic cock of gilt bronze, with his wings partly spread, and holding under his feet a lark that he menaced with his beak. The emblem was adopted by Victoria's father as a military ornament after a heroic combat in which, at the head of only a handful of men, he exterminated a Roman legion that bore a lark on its ensign. Under the weapons stood a little brass vase in which seven twigs of mistletoe were arranged. Gaul, you must remember, my son, reconquered her religious liberty in recovering her independence. Close to the brass vase and the twigs of mistletoe, a druid symbol, was a wooden cross, in commemoration of the death of Jesus of Nazareth, for whom the Mother of the Camps, without being a Christian, professed profound admiration. She looked upon him as one of the sages who shed luster upon humanity.

Such, my son, was Victoria the Great, the illustrious Gallic woman whose name our descendants will ever pronounce with pride.

When the Mother of the Camps saw me come in, she rose

quickly and approached me with gladness, saying in her sonorous and sweet voice:

"Welcome, brother! The mission was a dangerous one. Not seeing you back before sunset, I did not wish to send any message to your house, lest I alarm your wife by showing uneasiness at your prolonged absence. But here you are; I feel happy to see you back again."

Saying this Victoria pressed my hand tenderly in hers.

The words that we spoke must have disturbed the slumber of Victoria's grandson; he moved in his cradle and made a slight sound. Victoria stepped quickly to him, and kissed the child on the forehead. She then sat down, and placing the tip of her foot on a treadle below the cradle, rocked it gently, while she continued her conversation with me.

"And the message?" she asked, "how did the barbarians receive it? Are they ready for peace? Do they want war? Did they accept our proposition?"

I was just about to begin giving my foster-sister a complete account of my mission, when she interrupted me with a gesture, and, reflecting a second, proceeded to say:

"Do you know that my dear relative Tetrik has been here since yesterday?"

"I know it, sister."

"He is due here any moment. I prefer that you make the report to me before him only."

"I shall do so. Can you receive Captain Marion? He came for a conference with Victorin."

"Schanvoch, my son again spent the night out of the house!" remarked Victoria plying her needle more quickly, an action that, with her, always denoted deep annoyance.

"Having heard of your relative's arrival, I surmised that,

possibly, grave questions kept Victorin closeted with Tetrik during the night. That is the theory I threw out to Captain Marion, and told him that perhaps you would be ready to hear the report he has for your son."

Victoria remained silent for a moment; she then dropped her needlework on her lap, raised her head and resumed in a tone of suppressed grief:

"Victorin has vices—his vices are smothering his good parts. Moths destroy the best of grain."

"Have confidence and hope—age will mature him."

"During the last two years his vices grow upon him, his good parts decline."

"His bravery, his generosity, his frankness have not degenerated."

"His bravery no longer is the calm and provident bravery that becomes a general—it is becoming blind—headless. His generosity no longer distinguishes between the worthy and the unworthy. His reasoning powers decline—wine and debauchery are killing him. By Hesus! A drunkard and a debauché! He, my son! One of the chiefs of Gaul, free to-day and, perhaps, to-morrow, matchless among nations. Schanvoch, I am an unfortunate mother!"

"Victorin loves me—I shall reprove him severely."

"Do you imagine that your remonstrances will accomplish what the prayers of his own mother have failed to do? Of the mother who never left his side all his life, following him with the army, often even into battle? Schanvoch, Hesus punishes me—I have been too proud of my son!"

"And what mother would not have been proud of him the day when a whole valiant army, of its own free choice, ac-

claimed as its chief the general of twenty years of age, behind whom they saw—you, his mother!"

"What does it matter, if he dishonors me! And yet, my only ambition was to make of my son a citizen, a man worthy of our fathers! Did I not, when nourishing him with my milk, also nourish him with an ardent and holy love for our Gaul that was coming to life again—and to freedom! What was it that I asked; what was it that I always desired? To live an obscure life and ignored, but devote my night-watches and my days, my intelligence, my knowledge of the past, which enables me to understand the present, and at times to peer into the future— in short, to devote all the energies of my soul and of my mind to rendering my son brave, wise, enlightened, worthy at all points of guiding the free men who chose him their chief. And then, Hesus is my witness, proud as a Gallic woman, happy as a mother of having given birth to such a man, I would have enjoyed his glory and my country's prosperity in the seclusion of my humble home. But to have a drunkard and debauché for a son! Oh, wrath of heaven! Does not the giddy-headed boy understand that every excess that he indulges in is a slap that he gives his mother in the face? If he does not understand it, our soldiers do. Yesterday, as I crossed the camp, three old horsemen rode towards me. Do you know what they said to me? 'Mother, we pity you!'—and they rode off dejectedly. Schanvoch, I tell you, I am an unhappy mother!"

"Listen to me. For some time since, our soldiers have been growing dissatisfied with Victorin. I admit it, I understand it. The warrior whom free men have chosen for their chief must be above excesses, and must even be able to

control the impulses of his age. That is true, sister; and have I not often chided your son in your presence?"

"You have."

"Well, at this moment I take up his defense. These soldiers, whom we see to-day so full of scruples on the score of slips that are frequent with young chiefs, act, not so much in obedience to their own scruples, as in obedience to perfidious incitements that emanate from some secret enemy."

"What do you mean?"

"There are people who envy your son; they envy his influence over the troops. In order to undo him, his defects are being exploited so as to furnish a foundation for infamous calumnies."

"Who is jealous of Victorin? Who would have an interest in spreading such calumnies?"

"It is especially during the last month, not so, that this hostility to your son has manifested itself and has been on the increase?"

"Yes, yes; but whom do you suspect of inciting it?"

"Sister, what I am about to tell you is serious. It is a month ago that one of your relatives, the Governor of Gascony, came to Mayence—"

"Tetrik!"

"Yes; he departed after a stay of a few days! Almost immediately after Tetrik's departure the silent hostility towards your son began, and has since steadily grown!"

Victoria looked at me in silence, as if she did not quite grasp the bearing of my words. But a sudden thought seeming to flash through her mind, she cried in a tone of reproach:

"What! You suspect Tetrik! My own relative and best

friend, the wisest of men, one of the most enlightened citizens of our age, a man who seeks his delight in letters and displays no mean poetic talents! One of the most useful men in the defense of Gaul, although he is not a man of war! Tetrik, who in his government of Gascony repairs by dint of wisdom the evils that civil war inflicted upon the province! Oh, brother, I expected better things from your loyal heart and your good sense!"

"I suspect that man!"

"Oh, you iron-headed, inflexible nature! Why should you suspect Tetrik? By what right? What has he done? By Hesus! If you were not my brother—if I did not know your heart—I would think you are jealous of my esteem for my relative!"

Victoria had barely uttered these last words, when she seemed to regret having allowed them to escape her. She said:

"Forget these words!"

"They would greatly grieve me, sister, if the unjust doubt that they express could blind you to the truth."

At this moment the servant entered and asked whether Tetrik could be admitted.

"Let him in," answered Victoria, "let him in immediately."

Tetrik stepped into the room.

CHAPTER X.

TETRIK.

The personage who now entered the apartment was an undersized man of middle age. His face was refined and gentle; an affable smile played permanently around his lips. In short, his exterior bespoke so fully the man of honor that, seeing him enter, Victoria could not refrain from casting at me a look that still seemed to reproach me for my suspicions.

Tetrik walked straight to Victoria, kissed her on the forehead with paternal familiarity and said:

"Greeting to you, Victoria!"

And approaching the cradle in which the grandson of the Mother of the Camps still slept, the Governor of Gascony contemplated the child with tenderness, and added, in a low voice, as if afraid to awaken him:

"Sleep, poor little one! You are smiling in your infantine dreams, and you know not that, perhaps, the future of our beloved Gaul may rest upon your head. Sleep, little fellow, predestined, no doubt, to carry out the task that your glorious father has undertaken! A noble task that will engage his efforts for many long years under the inspiration of your august grandmother! Sleep, poor little one," Tetrik added, with eyes dimmed with tears of tenderness, "the gods that are propitious to Gaul will watch over you—you will grow up for the welfare of your country!"

While her relative wiped his moist eyes, Victoria again

interrogated me with her looks, as if asking me whether such was the language and the physiognomy of a traitor, of a cowardly hypocrite, of a man who was a perfidious enemy of the child's father.

Turning then to me, Tetrik said affectionately:

"Greeting to the best, the most faithful friend of the woman whom I most love and venerate in the world; greeting to Victoria's foster-brother."

"Your speech is true. I am the obscurest but also the most devoted friend of Victoria," I answered looking fixedly at Tetrik, "and it is the duty of a friend to unmask scamps and traitors."

"I am of your opinion, friend Schanvoch," Tetrik answered with simplicity. "A friend's first duty is to unmask scamps and traitors. I fear the roaring lion with its jaws wide open less than the serpent that creeps in the dark."

"Now, then, I, Schanvoch, have this to say to you, Tetrik. You are one of the dangerous reptile that you have just mentioned. I consider you a traitor! And I purpose to unmask your treason!"

"Schanvoch!" cried Victoria interrupting me in a reproachful tone.

"I perceive that the old Gallic love for raillery, one of our franchises, has returned with our gods and our freedom," replied the governor smiling.

And turning to Victoria he added:

"Our friend Schanvoch possesses the art of dry humor—the most amusing of all—"

"My brother speaks seriously and out of an honorable impulse," the Mother of the Camps broke in saying. "And I

grieve thereat, since I know that he is mistaken; but he is sincere in his error—"

Tetrik let his eyes wander alternately from Victoria to me with no little amazement; for a moment he was silent; thereupon he said in a serious and penetrating voice:

"All faithful friends are quick to suspect. Good Schanvoch, your distrust is inexplicable to me; but it must have its reason. The attack was frank, frank shall be the answer. Let us settle the question. What is your charge against me?"

"About a month ago you came to Mayence. A man of your retinue, your secretary, Morix by name and well supplied with money, gave the soldiers to drink and at the same time endeavored to irritate them against Victorin, saying to them that it was disgraceful that their general, one of the two chiefs of regenerated Gaul, should be a drunkard and a profligate. Did your secretary hold such language, yes or no? I wait for your answer."

"Proceed, friend Schanvoch, proceed—"

"Your secretary told a story that, being subsequently spread through the camp, has greatly irritated the soldiers against Victorin. This was the story: A few months ago, Victorin and several officers went to a tavern on one of the isles in the Rhine; after having drunk copiously, Victorin, excited by the wine, violated the innkeeper's wife, and she thereupon killed herself in despair—"

"Calumny!" cried Victoria. "I know and condemn my son's faults—but he is incapable of such an infamous act!"

The governor listened to me without betraying the slightest emotion. Presently he said with a smile and his habitual placidity of countenance:

"So, then, good Schanvoch, it is your opinion that, obedient

to orders received from me, my secretary spread unworthy calumnies in the camp?"

"Yes. It is all done with your knowledge and consent."

"And what could be my motive?"

"You are ambitious—"

"And in what manner could such calumnies subserve my ambition?"

"If the dissatisfaction of the soldiers with Victorin, whom they elected, continues, you would then use your influence with Victoria to the end of inducing her to propose you to the soldiers as Victorin's successor in the government of Gaul."

"A mother! Did you stop to consider that, good Schanvoch?" Tetrik answered looking at Victoria. "A mother sacrifice a son to a friend!"

"In the greatness of her love for her country, Victoria would certainly sacrifice her son to your elevation if the measure became necessary to the welfare of Gaul. Am I mistaken, sister?"

"No," Victoria answered me evidently grieved at my accusations against her relative; "in that you say the truth, but as to the inferences that you draw therefrom, I reject them."

"And that heroic sacrifice, good Schanvoch," resumed the governor, "Victoria is expected to make knowing that it was through my underground calumnies that her son's reputation was blasted with the soldiers?"

"My sister would not have been aware of your intrigues had I not unmasked them. Besides, more than once did I hear her say, and justly say, that in case peace was established, it would be better for the country if its chief, instead of being ever prone to battle, gave serious thought to the heal-

ing of the wounds inflicted by the past wars. She often mentioned you as one of the men who wisely prefer peace to war."

"It is true, I hold that the sword, good to destroy, is impotent to reconstruct," remarked Victoria; "and the freedom of Gaul once firmly established, I would prefer to see my son give more thought to peace than to war. It was, therefore, Schanvoch, that I commissioned you with one last attempt with the Franks, looking to the restoration of peace."

"Allow that I interrupt you, Victoria," put in Tetrik, "and that I ask our friend Schanvoch whether he has any other charges against me."

"I charge you with being either the secret agent of the Roman Emperor Galien, or the agent of the chief of the new creed, Roman Catholicism."

"I!" cried the governor. "I the agent of the Christians!"

"I said the agent of the chief of the new creed. I refer to the Bishop of Rome, who entitles himself 'Sovereign Pontiff.'"

"I the agent of Etienne, the Bishop of Rome, and fourteenth Pope of the new church?—of that Pope, of whom Firmilien, the Bishop of Caesarea, wrote to Cyprian, the presiding officer of the Spanish council, composed of twenty-eight bishops: 'Would one believe that that man (Pope Etienne) had a soul in his body? Evidently his body is but ill conducted, and his soul is in a disordered condition. Etienne does not stick at calling his brother Cyprian a false Christ, a false apostle, a fraudulent artisan; in order to forestall having these things said of himself, he has the audacity to make the accusation against others.' And can I be the agent of that ambitious pontiff! Of that simoniacal bishop, who is given over to all manner of vices!"

"Yes—unless that, deceiving at once both the Roman Emperor and the Pope of Rome, you are serving both, ready to sacrifice the one or the other, according as your ambition may require."

"That I serve the Romans is a thing that I am ready to admit," Tetrik answered with his unalterable placidity. "However unjust your suspicion towards me, it may be understood, as an instance of extreme patriotism. We are well aware that, although we have succeeded, by force of arms, to reconquer during nearly three centuries, inch by inch the full freedom once enjoyed by old Gaul, the Roman Emperors have seen with sorrow our country slip from their dominion. Accordingly, I can understand, Schanvoch, how you might accuse me of desiring to arrive at power in Gaul, with the end in view of sooner or later restoring the country to the Romans, although in doing so I would be betraying it most infamously. But is it imaginable that I act in the interest of the Pope of the Christians, of those unhappy people who are everywhere persecuted and martyrized? It is not a sane thought! What could I do for them? What could they do for me?"

Schanvoch was about to answer. Victoria interrupted him with a gesture and said to Tetrik while she pointed to the cross of black wood, the emblem of the death of Jesus, that was placed near the brass vase with the seven twigs of mistletoe, a druid symbol much in use among the Gauls:

"Look at that cross, Tetrik, it tells you that, without infidelity to our own gods, I nevertheless venerate him who said that no man has the right to oppress his fellows; that the guilty merit pity and consolation, not contempt and severity; and that the irons of the slave should be stricken off. Blessed

be these maxims, Tetrik; the wisest of our druids have accepted them as holy; accordingly, you may judge how dearly I love the gentle and pure morality of that young man of Nazareth. But listen, Tetrik," Victoria added pensively, "there is something unexplainable, strange and mysterious that makes me shudder. Yes, many a time and oft, during my long watches beside the cradle of my grandson, and when I pondered the present and the past, tormenting thoughts crowded upon my mind concerning the future of our well-beloved Gaul."

"And whence does your terror proceed?" Tetrik asked. "What is its cause?"

"That for three successive centuries Rome was the implacable foe of Gaul," Victoria answered; "that for so many centuries Rome was the merciless scourge of the world!"

"Rome?" replied the governor. "Pagan Rome?"

"Yes. The tyranny that weighed down upon the world had its seat in Rome," rejoined Victoria. "Now, then, I ask myself, by what strange fatality have the bishops, the Popes of the new creed, who aspire to reign over the universe by ruling the sovereigns of the world, been led to establish the seat of their empire in Rome? Jesus of Nazareth branded the high priests as liars and hypocrites. He preached above all, humility, forgiveness, equality, fraternity among men, and lo! in his apotheosized name, we now see a new hierarchy of high priests arising, pretending to be the rulers of the world, and already, as Pope Etienne, meriting the charges of ambition, deception and intolerance, even from their fellow Christian bishops!"

"Is it you, Victoria, who hold such language?" Tetrik interrupted her saying: "You so wise, so enlightened—can

you fear the future of Gaul to be endangered by those unhappy people who bear witness to their faith by their martyrdom?"

"Oh!" cried the Mother of the Camps with exaltation. "I love, I admire those poor Christians who die in torture while proclaiming the equality of man before God, the liberation of the slaves, the community of goods, love and forgiveness for the guilty! I love, I admire those poor Christians who die on the scaffold and proclaim in the name of Jesus: 'Those are monsters of iniquity who hold their brothers in bondage, who leave them to suffer in cold and hunger, instead of sharing with them their bread and their cloak.' Oh! pity and veneration for those heroic martyrs! But I stand in dread of those people who call themselves the chiefs, the Popes of the Christians. Yes, I stand in dread of those high priests who have fixed upon Rome as the seat of their mysterious empire!—in that city, the center of the most frightful tyranny that has ever crushed down the human race! I fear for the future of Gaul from that quarter."

"Victoria," again Tetrik interrupted, saying: "You exaggerate the power of those Christian pontiffs. Have not large numbers of them, persecuted by the Roman Emperors, undergone martyrdom, like any other neophytes?"

"Every battle has its dead, and the Popes struggle with the Emperors in order to wrench from these the dominion over the world! Among those bishops there have been many who have spoken and died like Jesus. But if there are some worthy pontiffs among them, and they are few, the domination of the priests is not, for that, any the less dread a visitation upon the people. Has not the government of our own priests been despotic and merciless? Did not the druids

leave the people for over ten centuries steeped in crassest ignorance, governing them with the instruments of barbarism—superstition and terror? Did not those days of oppression and debasement last until the glorious and prosperous epoch when, merged in the body of the nation as citizens, fathers and soldiers, our druids took part in the common life of the people, in the joys of the family, and in the national wars against the foreigner? What I apprehend for the future of the nations is that some day there may be established in Rome a murky alliance between the Pope and the most powerful Emperors and Kings of the world! Unhappy will that day be for the peoples! From such an alliance a frightful political and religious tyranny will be born, and it will be watered with the blood of fresh martyrs! Woe, then, to the peoples! They will once more be made to bend under a pitiless theocratic yoke!"

As she uttered these words, Victoria seemed inspired by the prophetic genius of the female druids of olden times. Tetrik listened to her in silence, but instead of answering, he resumed with a smile:

"See how far we have wandered from the charges that our friend Schanvoch has preferred against me—and yet, Victoria, your words, regarding the apprehension that the Christian high priests, as you style them, fill you with for the future, in a manner bring us back to the charges. So, then, Schanvoch, the purpose of the perfidies that you charge me with is to arrive at power in Gaul, to the end of betraying the country to pagan or to Catholic Rome?"

"Yes, that is my opinion."

"Schanvoch, I shall not need many words for my defense. One of my secretaries did seek to arouse the hostility of our

soldiers against Victorin. Your revelation comes rather late—"

"I learned the facts only yesterday."

"That is of no consequence," he replied, "that secretary was dismissed by me just because I learned that, irritated at Victorin for having railed at him several times, he sought to revenge himself by spreading against the general calumnies that were even more ridiculous and odious. But let us drop these petty matters. I am ambitious, you say, friend Schanvoch! I aim at the government of Gaul, even if, in order to accomplish my purpose, I should have to resort to unworthy intrigues! Now, ask Victoria what errand brings me back to Mayence."

"Tetrik believes that the peace and prosperity of Gaul require that the soldiers be induced to proclaim my son's son the heir of his father's office. Tetrik believes he can count upon the consent of Emperor Galien."

"Tetrik must, then, anticipate the speedy death of Victorin," I answered looking fixedly at the governor.

He, however, whose eyes were rarely met, seeing he kept them habitually lowered, answered:

"The Franks are on the other side of the Rhine—and Victorin is of temerarious bravery. My ardent wish is that he may live many more years; but death has no respect even for the most valuable life. It is my opinion that Gaul would find a pledge of security for the future if it knew that after Victorin the power would remain with the son of him whom the army acclaimed its chief, especially seeing that the child would have for his instructress Victoria, the Mother of the Camps."

"But in case Victoria were to die, who tells me, Tetrik,

that you would not have yourself appointed the child's tutor, exercise the power in his name, and in that manner arrive at the government of Gaul?"

"Are you speaking seriously, Schanvoch?" Tetrik replied. "Ask Victoria whether she needs my help in order to render her grandson worthy of her and of the country? Do you imagine she is one of those weak women who feel forced to share a glorious task with others? Is not the idolatry that the soldiers entertain for her a sufficient guarantee that, in the event of Victorin's premature death, she could preserve alone the wardship of her grandson and govern in his name?"

Victoria shook her head thoughtfully and sadly, and said:

"I do not like your project of transmitting the office by inheritance, Tetrik. What! Shall a child, still in his cradle, be designated to the soldiers for their choice! Who knows what may become of this child?"

"Has he not you for his teacher?" asked Tetrik.

"Have I not been the teacher and instructress of Victorin also?" the Mother of the Camps answered sadly. "And yet, despite all my vigilant cares, my son has defects that serve as the basis for frightful calumnies. But of these, I sincerely assure you, Tetrik, I hold you guiltless; and I now hope that my brother Schanvoch will join me in doing justice to your loyalty."

"I said so before, I repeat it now—I suspect this man!" I answered Victoria.

She replied with impatience: "And I said so before and repeat it now—you are a head of iron, a genuine Breton head, rebellious to all reason, the moment a notion takes root in your brain."

Instinctively convinced of Tetrik's perfidy, but having no more proofs against him, I said nothing more.

But Tetrik resumed with a smile, and without betraying the slightest perturbation:

"Neither you nor I, Victoria, could convince our good Schanvoch of his error. Let us leave that to an irresistible seductress—Truth. It will with time furnish the evidence of my loyalty. We shall return later, Victoria, to your repugnance in the matter of causing the army to acclaim your grandson the heir of his father's office. I still expect to overcome your scruples. But as I came in I saw one of your officers who seemed to await his turn for an audience. Do you not think it well to let him come in? It is Captain Marion, the old blacksmith, whom you introduced to me at my first trip to the camp as one of the bravest men in the army."

"His valor matches his disposition and good judgment," replied the Mother of the Camps. "The man has a noble heart and is a faithful friend. Despite his promotion, he has continued to love as a brother one of the old companions of his trade, who remained a simple soldier."

"Even at the risk of being again taken for an iron head, I am of the opinion that in the matter of this affection the good heart of Captain Marion misleads his judgment. I can only hope, Victoria, that your blindness may not be as complete as Captain Marion's."

"Do you mean that the faithful companion of Captain Marion is his enemy?" queried Victoria. "You are singularly mistrustful to-day, brother!"

When I alluded to Captain Marion and his friend I again sought to catch the eyes of the Governor of Gascony, but in

vain. Nevertheless it was with no slight surprise that I noticed him slightly start with joy when I asserted that Captain Marion had a secret foe in his camp companion. Ever master over himself, Tetrik doubtlessly feared that slight as was his manifestation of joy it might not have escaped me. He said:

"Envy is so revolting a feeling that I can never hear it mentioned without it makes a painful impression upon me. I feel positively grieved at what Schanvoch, who in this respect also, I hope, may be mistaken, tells us of the comrade of Captain Marion. But, should my presence prevent you from receiving the captain, Victoria, I shall withdraw."

"On the contrary, I wish you to be present at the interview that I am to have with Marion and my brother Schanvoch. They were given important commissions by my son, and yet," she added with a sigh, "the morning is passing, and my son is not yet home!"

At that very moment the door of the room was thrown open, and Victorin entered accompanied by Captain Marion.

CHAPTER XI.

VICTORIN.

The son of Victoria the Great was then in his twenty-third year. I told you, my son, that several medals were struck on which he figured in the guise of the god Mars beside his mother, who wore on her head a casque resembling that of the antique Minerva. Indeed, Victorin could have served as a model for a statue of the god of war. Tall, supple, robust, with a shape at once elegant and martial, he pleased all eyes. His features, imprinted with the rare beauty of his mother's, differed from them by an expression of mirthfulness and daring. The openness and generosity of his character was clearly visible on his face. On seeing him, one forgot, despite himself, the defects that marred that manly being, too vivacious and too fiery to curb the impulses of his age. Victorin doubtlessly came from a night of pleasure; yet his face looked as fresh as if he had just left his bed. A felt coif, ornamented with a little brooch, half covered his black hair, that fell in luxuriant ringlets around his virile and browned face. His Gallic blouse, made of silken fabric striped white and purple, was held around his waist by a silver-embroidered leather belt, from which hung his curiously chiseled gold hilted sword—a veritable masterpiece of Autun goldsmithing. Upon entering his mother's room followed by Captain Marion, Victorin proceeded straight to her with

a mixture of tenderness and respect. He dropped upon one knee, took and kissed one of her hands, removed his head-cover, and, reaching up his forehead for her to kiss, said:

"Greeting to my mother!"

There was so touching a charm in the young general's features and posture, there on his knee before his mother, that I noticed her hesitate for a second between the desire to embrace the son whom she adored and the inclination to express her dissatisfaction with him. She gently pushed Victorin's head back with her hand, and said in a grave voice while pointing at the cradle that stood near:

"Embrace your son—you have not seen him since yesterday."

The young general understood the indirect reproach; he rose sadly, approached the cradle, took up the child in his arms, and embraced him effusively while his eyes wandered over to his mother, as if to tell her that he was indemnifying himself for her maternal severity.

Captain Marion had drawn close to me and said in a low voice:

"After all, Victorin has a good heart. How he does love his mother! How he cherishes his child! He surely is as much attached to them as I am to my friend Eustace, who constitutes my whole family. What a pity that that pest of profligacy" (the good captain hardly ever spoke without throwing in those words) "so frequently has the young man fast in its claws!"

"It is a misfortune! But do you believe Victorin capable of the infamous act that he is charged with in camp?" I inquired from the captain loud enough to be heard by Tetrik,

who, speaking with Victoria in a low voice, seemed to be reproaching her for her severity towards her son.

"No, by the devil!" was Marion's quick answer. "I do not believe Victorin capable of such indignities—least way when I see him there between his mother and child."

After carefully placing his child back into the cradle and kissing its outstretched hands, the young general said affectionately to the Governer of Gascony:

"Greeting to Tetrik! I always love to see among us my mother's wise and faithful friend."

And turning towards me:

"I knew that you had returned, Schanvoch. When I heard the news my heart filled with joy—with as much joy as I felt apprehension during your absence. These Frankish bandits have often shown us how little they respect truces and parliamentarians."

But doubtlessly noticing the sadness that still marked the visage of Victoria, her son approached her and said with as much frankness as tender deference:

"Listen, mother—before you broach the matter of Captain Marion's and Schanvoch's messages, let me tell you what I have upon my heart; it might unwrinkle your brow, and I might no longer read on it the displeasure that afflicts me. Tetrik is a kind relative, Captain Marion is our friend, Schanvoch your brother—I can here speak freely. Admit it, mother, you are annoyed that I spent the night out of the house, are you not?"

"Your disorderly conduct grieves me, Victorin—and it grieves me still more to see that my voice is no longer heard by you."

"Mother, I shall make a full confession to you; but I

swear that I have upbraided myself more severely for my weakness than you could have done yourself. Last evening, faithful to my promise of discussing fully with you the grave matters that we have in hand, I went home betimes; I had declined—Oh! heroically declined an invitation to take supper with three of the captains of the legions that recently arrived at Mayence from Beziers. Vain were all their praises of the kegs of fine old wines, of that country of wine *par excellence,* that they brought with them carefully stowed away in their war chariots to celebrate their safe arrival. I remained unmoved. They then tried to win me over by speaking of two strolling Bohemian songstresses, Kidda and Flora —pardon me, mother, for pronouncing the names of such women before you, but truthfulness compels me to do so. These Bohemian girls, my tempters said to me, had recently arrived in Mayence; they described them as wondrously beautiful, frisky as demons, magnificent dancers, and singers like nightingales! Certes, there was enough to tempt me in such a description."

"Ah! I see it—I see it clearly approaching, that pest of profligacy—I see it creeping towards him on its velvet feet, like a wily and hungry tigress!" Marion cried. "How I would like to make those brazen Bohemian she-devils dance on sheets of red-hot iron! It is only then they would sing tunes to suit my ears—"

"I was even wiser than you, brave Marion," Victorin proceeded to say; "I did not wish to see and hear them dance and sing in any way; I ran precipitately away from my tempters to come here—"

"It is easy to say that; run away?—that pest of profligacy

has legs as long as its arms and teeth!" the captain said. "It surely overtook you, Victorin!"

"Deign to listen to me, mother," Victorin resumed, seeing my foster-sister make a gesture of disgust and impatience. "I was only two hundred paces from the house—the night was dark—a woman wrapped in a hooded cloak accosted me."

"Now they are three!" cried the good captain clasping his hands. "We now have the two Bohemian girls reinforced by a hooded woman. Oh, unfortunate Victorin! You have no idea what diabolical snares lie hidden under those hoods—my friend Eustace would surely succumb and wind up by being hooded himself—but I would flee!"

"'My father is an old soldier,' the woman said to me," proceeded Victorin with his narrative. "'One of his old wounds opened, he is dying; he knew you as a child, Victorin; he does not wish to die without once more pressing the hand of his young general; you will not refuse such a favor to my dying father, will you?' Such was the tale of the unknown woman; she spoke in accents that went straight to my heart. What would you have done, mother?"

"Despite my dread of women's hoods, I would have gone and seen the poor old soldier," answered the captain. "Certes, I would have gone, seeing that my presence would render death sweeter to him."

"Well, I did what you would have done, Marion. I followed the unknown woman; we arrived at a rickety house; it was dark; the door opened; my female guide seized my hand; led by her, I took a few steps in the darkness. Suddenly the glare of lights fell upon my eyes and dazed me. The three captains of the Beziers legions and other officers

surrounded me. The veiled woman dropped her wraps, and I recognized—"

"One of the cursed Bohemian girls!" cried the captain. "Ha! I told you so, Victorin! Women's hoods hide frightful things!"

"Frightful? Alas, no, Marion! I had not the courage to shut my eyes. I was immediately surrounded from all sides; the other Bohemian girl ran out of a room and joined my captors. The doors were locked. I was dragged to a seat of honor at a banquet table. Kidda placed herself at my right, Flora at my left; and before me, upon a table loaded with eatables, rose one of the kegs of old and divine nectar, as the accursed fellows informed me; and—"

"And day surprised you in that fresh orgy," said Victoria interrupting her son. "You thus forgot amidst the pleasures of the table and debauchery the hour that summoned you to me! Is that an excuse?"

"No, dear mother, it is a confession—I was weak—but as truly as Gaul is free, I would have come dutifully home to you, but for the ruse by which I was misled and kept away. Will you not be indulgent towards me, mother, this once? I pray you!" saying which Victorin again knelt down before my foster-sister. "Be not so severe! I know my faults! Age will cure me! I am still too young, and my blood is still too warm. The ardor of pleasure often carries me away, despite myself—and yet, you know, mother, I would give my life for you—"

"I believe you—but yet you will not sacrifice to me your insensate and evil passions—"

"When one sees Victorin so respectful and repentant at his mother's feet," I whispered to Marion, "would one think he

is the celebrated general, so dreaded by the enemies of Gaul—the general, who, at the age of twenty-two already has won five great battles?"

"Victoria," said Tetrik in his kind and insinuating voice, "I also am a father and inclined to indulgence. Besides, in my hours of recreation, I am a poet, and I wrote an ode to Youth. How could I be severe? I love Victorin's brilliant qualities so much, that I find it hard to censure him! Could you be insensible to the tender words of your son? His only crime is his youth. As he said, years will cure that—and his affection for you, his deference to your wishes will hasten the cure—"

As the Governor of Gascony was saying these words, a great noise was heard outside of the house, and the cry was soon heard:

"To arms! To arms!"

Victoria, who was seated, quickly rose to her feet, together with Victorin.

"They cry to arms!" repeated Captain Marion anxiously, and listened.

"The Franks must have broken the truce!" I cried in turn. "Yesterday one of their chiefs threatened me with a speedy attack upon our camp; I did not believe they would put their threat so quickly into action."

"A truce is never broken before its expiration, without notice is given in advance," observed Tetrik.

"The Franks are barbarians; they are capable of any act of treachery," cried Victoria rushing to the door.

It opened before an officer covered with dust, and so breathless that he could not at first utter a word.

"Do you not belong to the post of the camp's vanguard,

four leagues from here?" the young general asked the officer; he knew personally all the officers of the army. "What has happened?"

"A large number of rafts, loaded with troops and towed by barks, hove in sight towards the middle of the Rhine, when, upon orders of the commander of the post, I rode hither at full speed to bring the news to you, Victorin. By this hour the Frankish hordes must have disembarked. The post that I left is too weak to resist a whole army, and must have fallen back upon the camp. While crossing the camp I cried to arms! The legions and cohorts are forming in all haste."

"It is the barbarians' answer to the message that Schanvoch took to them," said the Mother of the Camps to Victorin.

"What answer did the Franks give you?" the young general asked me.

"Neroweg, one of the principal kings of their army, rejected all idea of peace," I said to Victorin. "The barbarians are set upon invading Gaul and subjugating us. I threatened their chief with a war of extermination. He answered me insolently that the sun would not rise six times before he would fall upon our camp, set fire to our tents, pillage our baggage and carry off Victoria the Great—"

"If they are on the march upon us, we have not a minute to spare!" cried Tetrik in a fright addressing the young general, who, calm and collected, with his arms crossed over his chest, was reflecting in silence. "We must act, and act quickly!"

"Before acting," answered Victorin, "we must reflect."

"But," replied the governor, "suppose the Franks move with forced marches upon the camp?"

"So much the better!" Victorin said impatiently. "So much the better! We shall let them draw near to us!"

Victorin's answer astonished Tetrik, and I must admit, I would myself have been astonished and even alarmed at hearing the young general speak of temporizing in the presence of an imminent attack, had I not had innumerable proofs of his unerring judgment. His mother made a sign to the governor not to disturb her son in his meditation upon the plan of battle, which, undoubtedly, he was revolving in his mind, and said to Marion:

"You arrived this morning from your trip to the inhabitants on the other side of the Rhine, who are so often pillaged by these barbarians. What is the plan of those tribes?"

"Too weak to act single-handed, they are ready to join us at the first call. Fires, that we are to light either by day or night on the hill of Berak, will give them the signal. There will be men on the watch for them. The moment the signal is given they will start on the march. One of our best captains shall head a troop of picked soldiers across the river and effect a junction with them, while the bulk of our army shall simultaneously operate upon this side."

"The plan is excellent, Captain Marion," observed Victoria approvingly. "Especially at this juncture, such an alliance is of great service to us. Your eyes have, as usual, seen rightly."

"If one has good eyes, he must seek to put them to the best use possible," the captain answered with his wonted affability. "That is what I said to my friend Eustace."

"What friend is that?" asked Victoria. "Whom do you refer to?"

"I refer to a soldier—my old companion at the anvil. I

took him with me on the journey that I am now back from. Thus, instead of ruminating over my little projects all to myself, I uttered them aloud to my friend Eustace. He is discreet; by no means a fool; true enough, he is as peevish as the devil, and he often grumbles at me, whereat I profit not a little."

"I am aware of your friendship for that soldier," replied Victoria. "Your affection does you honor."

"To love an old friend is a simple and natural matter. I said to him: 'Do you see, Eustace, one day or other those Frankish skinners will undertake a decisive attack upon us. In order to protect their retreat, they will leave a body of reserve to protect their camp and wagons. That reserve will not be too large a morsel for our allied tribes to swallow, especially if they are reinforced by a picked legion in command of one of our own captains. So that if those skinners are beaten on this side of the Rhine, their retreat will be cut off on the other side of the river.' What I then foresaw is coming about to-day. The Franks are attacking us; I think we should forthwith send word to the allied tribes, and follow that with some picked troops, commanded by a captain of energy, prudence and skill—"

"That captain will be yourself, Marion," Victoria quickly put in interrupting the captain.

"I? Very well! I know the country. My plan is quite simple. While the Franks are marching upon us, I shall cross the Rhine, and there burn their wagons and cut the reserve to pieces. Let Victorin deliver battle on our side of the river; the Franks will then try to re-cross the Rhine; there they will find me and my friend Eustace ready to meet them with something else than a glad hand to help them dis-

embark. And their hopes will be dashed when they learn that camp, reserves and wagons have all gone up in flames."

"Marion," replied my foster-sister after having carefully listened to the captain, "victory is certain if you carry out the plan with your customary bravery and coolness."

"I have great good hopes. My friend Eustace said to me in a more than usually querulous voice: 'Your plan is not so very stupid; it is not so very stupid.' I know from experience that the approval of Eustace has always brought me good luck."

"Victoria," Tetrik approached saying in a low voice and no longer able to control his uneasiness, "I am not a man of war. I repose complete confidence in the military genius of your son. But an enemy twice as strong as ourselves is drawing nearer by the minute—and Victorin, still absorbed in his meditations, decides nothing, orders nothing!"

"He told you rightly that before acting, one must think," answered Victoria. "The power of calm reflection, at the moment of danger, is the sign of a wise and prudent captain. Would it not be folly to run blindly ahead of danger?"

Suddenly Victorin clapped his hands, leaped to his mother's neck, embraced her and cried:

"Mother—Hesus inspires me. Not one of the barbarians who crossed the river will escape, and the peace of Gaul will be assured for many years. Your project is excellent, Captain Marion; it fits in with my own plan of battle, as if we had jointly conceived it!"

"What! Did you hear me?" asked the astonished captain. "I thought you were wrapped up in your own thoughts!"

"However absorbed a lover may seem to be, he always overhears what is said of his sweetheart, my brave Marion,"

was Victorin's mirthful answer. "My sovereign mistress is war!"

"Again that pest of profligacy!" Captain Marion whispered to me. "Alack! It pursues him even in his thoughts of battle!"

"Marion," remarked Victorin, "we have on this side of the Rhine two hundred and ten barks of war propelled by six oars—have we?"

"About that number, and well equipped!"

"Fifty of them will suffice for you to transport the reinforcement of picked troops that you are to take to our allies. The remaining hundred and sixty, manned by ten soldier oarsmen provided with axes, besides twenty picked archers, will hold themselves ready to descend the Rhine as far as the promontory of Herfel, where they will wait for further instructions. Issue this order to the captain of the flotilla before you embark."

"It shall be done—rely upon me!"

"Carry out your plan, brave Marion, from point to point. Cut the Frankish reserve to pieces, burn their camp and wagons. Ours is the day if I succeed in forcing the barbarians to retreat," said Victorin.

"And you will, Victorin! I shall run for my friend, Eustace, and carry out your orders."

Before leaving the room Captain Marion drew his sword, presented the hilt to the Mother of the Camps and making the military salute, said:

"Touch this sword with your hand if you please, Victoria—it will be a good augury for the day."

"Go, brave and good Marion," answered the Mother of the

Camps returning the weapon after she had clasped the hilt with a virile hand; "go, Hesus is with Gaul!"

"Our battle cry shall be, 'Victoria!' and it will resound from one bank of the river to the other," Marion exclaimed with exaltation; and leaving precipitately he added: "I shall run for my friend Eustace, and then to our barks! to our barks!"

As Marion was rushing out of the room, several chiefs of legions and cohorts, having learned of the landing of the Franks from the officer who brought the tidings to the camp —tidings that rapidly spread among the soldiers—hastened to Victorin in order to receive the orders of their general.

"Place yourselves at the head of your detachments," he said to them, "and march to the parade ground. I shall join you there and assign you your posts in battle. I wish first to confer with my mother."

"We well know your valor and military genius," answered the oldest of the chiefs of the cohorts, a robust old man with a white beard. "Your mother, the angel of Gaul, watches by your side; we shall await your orders confident of victory."

"Mother," said the young general in touching accents, "your pardon, here before all, and a kiss from you will give me the needed courage for this day of bloody battle!"

"The excesses of my son have often saddened my heart, as they have the hearts of you all who have known him since his earliest days," said Victoria to the chiefs of the cohorts; "I hope you will forgive him as I do."

Saying this she clasped her son passionately to her heart.

"Infamous calumnies against Victorin have floated about the camp," the old captain proceeded to say. "We gave them no credence; but, less enlightened than ourselves, the soldier

is ever hasty in censure as he is in praise. Follow the instructions of your august mother, Victorin, and no longer offer a handle to calumny. We shall wait for your orders on the parade ground; rely upon us, as we do upon you."

"You speak to me like a father," answered Victorin deeply moved by the simple and dignified words of the old captain. "I shall hearken to your words as a son; your old experience guided me on the field of battle when I was still a child; your example made me the soldier that I am; to-day and always I shall strive to approve myself worthy of you and of my mother—worthy of Gaul—"

"It is your duty, seeing that we glory in you and her," rejoined the old captain; and addressing Victoria: "Will the army not see you before we march to battle? To the soldiers and to us your presence always is a good omen—and your good words fire our courage."

"I shall accompany my son as far as the parade ground—let the battle and triumph follow! Once the Roman eagles circled over our enslaved nation! The Gallic cock drove them away! And it will again drive away this cloud of birds of prey that seek to swoop down upon our Gaul!" cried the Mother of the Camps in so proud and superb a transport that, at the moment, I believed I saw before me the goddess of our land and of liberty. "By Hesus, shall the barbarous Franks conquer us? Before that happens neither a lance, nor a sword, nor a scythe, nor a club, nor a stone can have been left in Gaul! By Hesus! We shall triumph over the barbarian Franks!"

At these brave words, the chiefs of the legions, sharing the enthusiasm of Victoria, spontaneously drew their swords, struck them against one another, and cried in chorus the war cry that they had more than once intoned:

"By the iron of our swords, Victoria, we swear to you that Gaul shall remain free!—or you will never see us again!"

"Yes, by your beloved and august name, Victoria, we shall fight to the last drop of our blood."

And all left the room crying:

"To arms, our legions!"

"To arms, our cohorts!"

During the whole scene, in which the military genius of Victorin, his tender deference for his mother, the controlling influence that both she and he exercised over the chiefs of the army were displayed, I more than once cast a covert look at the Governor of Gascony, who had withdrawn into a corner of the room. Was it fear at the approach of the Franks? Was it secret rage at witnessing how idle were his calumnies against Victorin?—because, despite the blandness and skilfulness of his defense, my suspicions were not lulled to sleep —I know not; but his livid and disturbed face grew by degrees more horrid to behold. Doubtlessly, evil thoughts and impulses, that he meant to keep concealed, came to the surface in that moment. Immediately after the departure of the chiefs, and as the Mother of the Camps turned to speak with the governor, the latter strove to resume his customary mask of mildness. Making an effort to smile he said to Victoria:

"You and your son are endowed with a sort of magic power. According to my feeble understanding nothing can be more alarming than this march of the Frankish army upon our camp, while neither of you seem to be particularly concerned, and you deliberate as calmly as if the battle was to be to-morrow. And yet, I must confess, the tranquility that you display under such circumstances inspires me with blind confidence."

"There is nothing more natural than our tranquility," replied Victorin. "I have calculated the time that it will take the Franks to cross the Rhine and disembark their troops, form their columns and arrive at a place that they are forced to cross. To hasten my movements would be a mistake, a grave strategic error. Delay serves my purposes well."

Victorin thereupon turned to me:

"Schanvoch, go and put on your armor; I shall have orders for you after I shall have conferred with my mother."

"You will join me here, before proceeding to the parade ground," Victoria said to me. "I also have some recommendations to make to you."

"I almost forgot to notify you of an important thing," said I. "The sister of one of the Frankish kings feared that her brother would put her to death, and fled the camp of the barbarians. She accompanied me to ours."

"The woman can serve as a hostage," remarked Tetrik. "It is a valuable capture. She should be kept a prisoner."

"No," I answered the governor. "I promised the woman that she would be free in the Gallic camp, and I assured her of Victoria's protection."

"I shall keep the promise that you made," replied my foster-sister. "Where is the woman?"

"At my house."

"Have her sent to me after the departure of our troops. I wish to see her."

I left the room together with the Governor of Gascony. As I stepped out several bards and druids, who, adhering to our ancient custom, always marched at the head of the armies in order to encourage the troops with their songs, stepped in to confer with Victoria and Victorin.

CHAPTER XII.

TO BATTLE!

Upon leaving Victoria's house I hastened home to arm myself and take my horse. From all parts of the camp trumpets and clarions were heard blowing signals. When I entered my house I found Sampso and my wife, whom the tidings of the landing of the Franks had speedily reached, busily engaged getting my arms ready. Ellen was vigorously furbishing my steel cuirass, the polish of which was soiled by the fire that was kindled upon it the day before by order of Neroweg, the Terrible Eagle and powerful king of the Franks.

"You are truly a soldier's wife," I said smiling to Ellen, seeing her provoked at not being able to restore the tarnished spot to the brilliancy of the rest of the cuirass. "The brilliancy of your husband's armor is your own greatest ornament."

"If we were not so much pressed for time," Ellen answered, "we would have succeeded in furbishing off this black spot. Sampso and I have for the last hour been wondering how you managed to blacken and tarnish your armor in this manner."

"They look like traces of fire," said Sampso, who was actively engaged polishing my casque with a piece of smooth skin. "Only fire can tarnish the polish of steel in that way."

"You have guessed right, Sampso," I answered her laughing and taking up my sword, my battle axe and my dagger; "there was a big fire in the camp of the Franks; those hospitable folks insisted that I draw near to the brasier; the evening was cool, and I hugged the fire a little too closely."

"I perceive that the announcement of battle throws you into a mirthful mood, my Schanvoch," put in my wife. "That is like you, I have long noticed it."

"And the announcement of battle does not sadden you, my Ellen, because you have a stout heart."

"I draw my strength from the faith of our fathers, my Schanvoch. It teaches me that we proceed to live in other worlds in the company of those whom we have loved in this," Ellen sweetly answered me while she and Sampso helped to buckle on my cuirass. "That is why I put into practice our mothers' maxim that the Gallic woman never grows pale when her brave husband departs for battle, and that she reddens with joy at his return. And if he does not return, she is proud at the knowledge that he died as a brave man, and every evening she says to herself: 'One more day has passed, one more step is taken towards those unknown worlds, where we shall meet our dear ones again.'"

"Let us not talk of absence but of return," said Sampso, offering me my casque, which she had so carefully polished with her own hands that she could have seen her sweet face in the burnished steel. "You have always been so lucky in war, Schanvoch, that I feel sure you will return to us."

"I rely on your faith, dear Sampso. I depart happy in the knowledge of your sisterly affection, and of Ellen's love. I shall return happy, above all if I shall have been able to leave a fresh mark on the face of a certain king of those Frankish

skinners of human bodies, as a token of acknowledgment for the loyalty of the hospitality that he yesterday bestowed upon me. But here I am armed. A kiss to my little Alguen, and then to horse!"

As I was about to proceed to my wife's room, Sampso held me back, saying:

"Brother—what of the strange woman?"

"You are right, Sampso; I forgot all about her."

As a matter of precaution I had locked Elwig's room. I knocked at the door and called out to her:

"Shall I come in?"

I received no answer. Alarmed at the silence I opened the door. Elwig sat on the edge of the couch with her head in her hands, in the identical posture that I saw her last.

"Did sleep bring you rest?"

"There is no more sleep for me!" she answered brusquely. "Riowag is dead! I weep for my lover!"

"My wife and sister will take you at noon to Victoria the Great. She will treat you as a friend. I announced to her your arrival in our camp."

The sister of Neroweg, the Terrible Eagle, shrugged her shoulders with indifference.

"Do you need anything?" I asked her. "Would you eat or drink?"

"I want water—I am thirsty—"

Despite the priestess' refusal to eat, Sampso went for some provisions—a pitcher of water, some bread and fruits—and placed them near Elwig, who remained motionless and mute. I again locked the door and gave the key to my wife, saying:

"You and Sampso will take the poor woman to Victoria at

noon. But be careful that she is not left alone with our child—"

"Do you fear anything?"

"Everything is to be feared from those barbarian women; they are as wily as they are ferocious. I killed her lover in defending myself against him; she is quite capable of strangling my child out of vengeance."

You came running in at that moment, my child. Hearing my voice from your mother's room, you left your bed and came half naked to me with your little arms outstretched, smiling with pleasure at the sight of my armor, the brilliancy of which pleased your eyes. Time pressed; I embraced you, your mother and aunt tenderly. I then proceeded to saddle my horse, my good and strong Tom-Bras,[1] whom I named in remembrance of our ancestor Joel, who also gave the name of Tom-Bras to the spirited stallion that he rode at the battle of Vannes. Sampso and your mother, the latter of whom took you in her arms, accompanied me to the stable. Your aunt helped me to put on the bridle, and, caressing his sinewy neck, said to the war steed:

"Tom-Bras, do not leave your master in danger; save him with your swiftness, if need be; defend him like the brave Tom-Bras of old who, as he bore the brenn of the tribe of Karnak, attacked the Romans with his hoofs and teeth."

"Dear Sampso," I answered smiling as I leaped into the saddle, "do not give Tom-Bras bad advice by urging him to save me with his swiftness. A good war horse is rapid in pursuit, slow in flight. As to plying his teeth and hoofs, he does that to perfection; the Frankish horse that I captured, and that he almost tore to shreds in the stable, can testify

[1] Ardent, or Fiery. See "The Brass Bell," the second work of this series.

to that. Tom-Bras is like his master; he abhors the Franks. Adieu, dear Sampso! Adieu, my beloved Ellen! Adieu, my little Alguen!"

Casting one more look at your mother who held you in her arms, I departed at a gallop to the parade ground, where the army was assembling.

The distant sound of the clarions, and the neighing of the horses, to which he responded, enlivened Tom-Bras. He bounded with vigor. I calmed him with my voice, I patted his neck so as to control his buoyant spirits and reserve his energy for the hard day's work ahead. When I was near the parade ground I perceived Victoria about a hundred paces ahead of me. She rode with an escort of several mounted officers. I quickly joined them. Mounted on a palfrey, Tetrik rode to the left of the Mother of the Camps; at her right rode a druid bard named Rolla, whom she greatly esteemed for his bravery, his noble character and his poetic talents. Several other druids were scattered among the various army corps, and were to march beside the chiefs at the head of their several detachments.

Coifed in the light brass helmet of the antique Minerva, which was surmounted with the Gallic cock in gilt bronze holding an expiring lark under his spurs, Victoria sat with proud ease her beautiful steed, whose satin coat shimmered like silver. The housings of the prancing animal were, like its bridle, of scarlet color, they almost reached the ground and were partially covered by the long black robe of the Mother of the Camps, who seemed to inspire her mount with her own self-restraint and confidence. Her beautiful and virile visage seemed animated with martial ardor. A light flush suffused her cheeks; her bosom heaved; her large blue

eyes shone with matchless brilliancy, under their long black lashes. Without being noticed by her, I joined the riders of her escort. With their banners to the breeze and their platoons of trumpeters at their head, the cohorts passed by us one after the other on their way to the parade ground. The officers saluted Victoria with their swords, the banners dipped before her, and soldiers, captains and chiefs, in short, the whole armed force cried in enthusiastic chorus:

"Greeting to Victoria the Great!"

"Greeting to the Mother of the Camps!"

Among the first soldiers of one of the cohorts that passed us, I recognized Douarnek, one of the four oarsmen of the day before who was wounded in the back by an arrow. Despite his recent wound, the brave Breton marched in his place. I pricked my horse, drew near him and said:

"Douarnek, the gods send a propitious opportunity to Victorin to prove to the army that, unworthy calumnies to the contrary notwithstanding, he is still worthy of his post."

"You are right, Schanvoch," the Breton answered. "Let Victorin win this battle, as he won the others, and in the joy of their triumph the soldiers will acclaim their general and forget many a disagreeable thing. We shall meet again, Schanvoch!"

Some Roman legions, our then allies, shared the enthusiasm of our own troops. As they passed under the eyes of Victoria their acclamations also greeted her. The whole army, the cavalry on the two wings, the infantry in the center, was soon gathered on the parade ground, a vast field that lay without the camp. It was bounded by the Rhine on one side, on the other by the slopes of a high hill. A wide road was seen at a distance. It wound its way and disap-

peared behind some woody slopes. The casques, the arms, the banners, all of which were surmounted by the Gallic cock wrought in gilt copper, glistened in the rays of the sun, and presented the bright and cheerful sight that does so much to raise the soldier's spirits. From the moment that she entered the parade ground Victoria put her horse to a gallop in order to join her son, who, surrounded by a group of chiefs to whom he was issuing orders, was conspicuous in the very center of the field. No sooner had the Mother of the Camps, whose brass helmet, black robe and white steed pointed her out to all eyes, appeared before the front ranks of the army, than one loud, vast, ringing cry from fifty thousand soldiers' breasts saluted Victoria the Great!

"May that cry be heard of Hesus," my foster-sister said to the druid bard with deep emotion. "May the gods grant Gaul a new victory! Justice and right are on our side! We are not after conquest; we only defend our own soil, our hearths, our families, and our freedom!"

"Our cause is holy among holy causes!" answered Rolla, the druid bard. "Hesus will render our arms invincible!"

We rode up to Victorin. It seems to me I never saw him handsomer, or of a more martial bearing than on that morning, clad in his brilliant steel armor and with his casque, ornamented, like his mother's, by the Gallic cock and the expiring lark. Victoria herself, as she approached her son, could not keep from turning towards me and betraying her maternal pride with a look that, perhaps, only I understood. Several officers, the bearers of the young general's orders to the different army corps, left at a gallop in different directions. I drew near my foster-sister and said to her in a low voice:

"You reproach your son with no longer displaying that cool bravery that must distinguish the general of an army. And yet, watch and see how cool and collected he is. Do you not read in his masculine face the wise and cautious cast of mind of the general who will not rashly risk his soldiers' lives, or the fate of his country?"

"Your speech is sooth, Schanvoch; I saw him just as cool and collected at the great battle of Offenbach—one of his finest, one of his most fruitful victories. It was that victory that restored to us the Rhine for our frontier. It drove the accursed Franks to the other bank of the river."

"And to-day's battle will supplement the victory won at Offenbach, if, as I expect we shall, we drive off the barbarians for all time from our frontier."

"Brother," replied my foster-sister, "as always, you will not leave Victorin's side?"

"I promise you."

"He is now calm. But once the action is engaged, I fear the ardor of his blood, and his passion for battle. You know, Schanvoch, I do not fear peril for Victorin. I am the daughter, wife and mother of soldiers; all I fear is that, carried away by the heat of action, and anxious, even at the risk of his life, to achieve great deeds, he put the success of this day in jeopardy, and by his death endanger the safety of Gaul, that may otherwise be firmly established by to-day's action."

"I shall use my full powers to convince Victorin that a general must preserve himself for his army."

"Schanvoch," my foster-sister remarked with a tremulous voice, "you always are the best of brothers!"

And looking towards her son, evidently anxious that none but myself be made aware of the anxious thoughts that strug-

gled in her maternal breast, and her doubts concerning the firmness of his character, she added again, in a low voice:

"You will watch over him?"

"As over my own son."

After the young general issued his last orders, he alighted from his horse the moment he saw his mother, walked over to where she was, and said:

"The hour has come, mother. I have taken with the other captains the last dispositions on the plan of battle that I submitted to you and which you approved. I have reserved ten thousand men under the command of Robert, one of the most experienced chiefs, for the protection of the camp. He is to receive orders from you. May the gods look down favorably upon our arms. Adieu, mother. I shall do my best—"

Saying this he bent his knee.

"Adieu, my son. Come not back, unless you come back victorious over the barbarians!"

As she said these words, the Mother of the Camps stooped down from her horse and reached her hand to Victorin, who kissed it and rose.

"Be brave, my young Caesar!" the Governor of Gascony called out to my foster-sister's son. "The fate of Gaul is in your hands—and, thanks to the gods, your hands are powerful. Furnish me the opportunity to write an ode on this fresh victory."

Victorin remounted his horse. A moment later our army set itself upon the march, with the scouts on horseback riding ahead of the vanguard. Victorin placed himself at the head of the army. We had the bank of the Rhine on our right. A few light bodies of mounted archers rode forward as scouts,

to the end of guarding our left wing against a surprise. Victorin called me to his side; I drove my horse abreast his own, and as he hastened the step of his mount we were soon beyond the escort that accompanied him.

"Schanvoch," he said to me, "you are an old and experienced soldier. I wish to explain my plans to you. I confided the plan to the chief who is to take my place in the event of my being killed. I wish you also to be posted on it. You will be all the better able to help in its execution."

"I listen. Speak, Victorin."

"It is now nearly three hours since the rafts of the Franks were seen by our scouts at about the middle of the river. Those rafts, towed by barks and loaded with troops navigate slowly. It must have taken them fully an hour to reach the bank and disembark on this side of the Rhine—"

"Your calculation is correct. But why did you not hasten the march of the army in order to arrive at the spot before the Franks disembarked? Landing forces are always in disorder. Their disorder would have favored our attack."

"Two reasons kept me from doing so. I shall tell them to you. How long, do you calculate, did it take the officer, who notified us of the enemy's approach, to ride in all haste from our advanced posts to Mayence?"

"About an hour and a half. It is nearly five leagues from there to Mayence."

"And how long will it take an army to cover the same distance, even at forced marches, but not rapid enough to be tired out and breathless when it reaches the spot and offers battle?"

"It would take about three hours and a half."

"Accordingly, you will perceive, Schanvoch, that it would

have been impossible for us to have arrived in time to attack the Franks at the moment of their landing. Those barbarians' lack of discipline is surprising. They must have consumed considerable time in forming their ranks. This will enable us to arrive before and wait for them at the defile of Armstadt—the only military route open to them in order to attack our camp, unless they throw themselves across the marsh and the forests, where their cavalry, their principal arm, could not deploy."

"That is true."

"I temporized in order to give the Franks time to approach the defile."

"If they undertake the passage, they are lost."

"I hope so. With our swords in their loins we shall drive them back towards the river bank. Our hundred and sixty well armed barks, that left port under my orders and at the same time that we started on the march, will scatter the barbarians' rafts and cut off their retreat. Besides that, Captain Marion crossed the river with a picked body of men; he will effect a juncture with the friendly tribes on the other bank, and will march straight upon the Frankish camp, where the enemy must have left a strong reserve force together with all their wagons. These will all be destroyed!"

Victorin was thus engaged in unfolding to me his ably conceived plan of battle, when we saw several of the scouts, who were sent forward, running back to us at full gallop. One of these reined in his foaming steed and cried out to Victorin:

"The army of the Franks is advancing. It can be seen at a distance from the top of the hills. Their scouts approached the defile; they were all shot down by the arrows of our

archers who were ambushed behind the shrubs. Not one of the Frankish scouts escaped with his life."

"Well done," replied Victorin. "Those scouts would have ridden back and warned the Frankish army of our approach. It might not then have entered the defile. But I shall ride forward and judge the enemy's position myself. Follow me, Schanvoch!"

Victorin put his horse to a gallop; I did likewise. The escort followed us; we quickly overtook and passed our vanguard, to whom Victorin gave the order to halt. We arrived at a place that dominated the defile of Armstadt. The rather broad road lay at our feet, hemmed in by two steep escarpments. The one to the right seemed cut with the pick, it rose so perpendicular over the road and formed a sort of promontory on the side of the Rhine. The escarpment to the left consisted of a rocky series of shelves, and served, so to speak, as the basis to the vast plateau through the heart of which the deep and wide gully was cut. The gully or road dipped gently till it ran out into a vast plain, bordered to the east and north by the curve of the river, to the west by woods and marshes, and behind us by the elevated plateau where our troops were ordered to halt. We presently distinguished at a great distance from where we stood and down in the direction of the plain, a large and confused black mass. It was the army of the Franks.

Victorin remained silent for a few seconds; he attentively examined the disposition of the enemy's forces and the field at our feet.

"My calculation and expectation did not deceive me," he observed. "The Frankish army is twice as large as ours. If their tactics were less savage, instead of entering the defile,

as they will surely do, they would, despite the difficulty that accompanies that sort of assault, climb the plateau at several places simultaneously, and thereby compel me to divide my much inferior forces in order to attack them at a large number of places. Nevertheless, for greater certainty, and so as to lure the enemy into the defile, I shall resort to a ruse of war. Let us return to our vanguard; Schanvoch, the hour of battle has sounded!"

"And such an hour," I answered, "is always solemn!"

"Yes," he replied melancholically, "such an hour is always solemn, especially for the general, who, at this bloody game of war, plays with the lives of his soldiers and has his country's fate for stake. Come, let us ride back, Schanvoch—and may my mother's star protect me!"

I rode back with Victorin to our troops, asking myself due to what singular contradiction that young man, always so firm and so calculating at the great crises of his life, showed himself below mediocrity in the power to combat his foibles.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BATTLE OF THE RHINE.

The young general was not long in rejoining the vanguard. After a hurried conference with the officers, the troops took their posts of battle. Three cohorts of infantry, each one thousand strong, received orders to march through the defile into the open plain, engage the vanguard of the Franks, and draw the bulk of the enemy's army into the dangerous passage. Victorin, several officers and myself stood grouped upon one of the highest bluffs that dominated the field on which the scrimmage was to take place. From where we stood we had a complete view of the immense Frankish army. Massed in a compact body, the bulk of their forces was still far away. A swarm of horsemen rode in advance and extended beyond the two wings. Our three cohorts had barely emerged from the pass into the plain when the Frankish horsemen rushed like a swarm of hornets towards them from all sides and sought to envelop them. Intent only upon taking the lead of one another, these horsemen gave the rein to their mounts, and tumultuously, without any order whatever, galloped towards our troops. When the former had drawn near enough, the latter formed themselves into a wedge in order to sustain the first shock of the cavalry; they were thereupon to feign a retreat back into the defile. The Frankish horsemen emitted such loud yells that, despite the con-

siderable distance that separated us from the plain and the elevation of the plateau, their savage cries reached us like a muffled roar pierced from time to time by the distant notes of their wind instruments. As ordered, our soldiers did not yield to the first impetuous attack. In an instant we could see through the thick cloud of dust, raised by the Frankish horse, only a confused mass, in the midst of which our soldiers could be distinguished by their brilliant armor. Presently our troops began to operate their retreat towards the defile, yielding the ground before them foot by foot to the swarm of Frankish assailants, who received every moment fresh accessions from the cavalry of their vanguard, while their main body began to move at a quickened step.

"By heaven!" cried Victorin, his fiery eyes fixed upon the field, "our brave Firmian who commands those three cohorts seems to have forgotten in his ardor for the fray that he was steadily to fall back into the defile so as to draw the enemy in after him. Firmian is no longer retreating; he has stopped and does not budge back an inch—he will cause his troops to be uselessly sacrificed—"

And addressing one of the officers:

"Ride quick to Ruper, and order him to proceed with his three veteran cohorts to the support of Firmian's retreat. Ruper is to order the retreat to be made rapidly. The bulk of the Frankish army is now only a hundred bow-shots from the entrance of the defile."

The officer departed at a gallop. Obedient to the orders that he carried, the three veteran cohorts speedily emerged from the defile at the double quick; they hastened to join and sustain Firmian's troops; a little later the feigned retreat was effected in good order. Seeing the Gauls yield, the

Franks set up a shout of savage joy, and charged impetuously upon our cohorts. The Frankish vanguard was soon close to the mouth of the defile. Suddenly Victorin grew pale. Anxiety was depicted on his face as he cried:

"By my father's sword! Can I have been mistaken as to the barbarians' plans? Do you perceive their movement?"

"Yes," I said, "instead of following their vanguard into the defile, the Frankish army has halted; it is forming into numerous separate columns of attack, and these are marching towards the plateau! Malediction! They are resorting to the skilful manoeuvre that you feared. Oh, we have taught the barbarians the art of war!"

Victorin did not reply. He seemed to be counting the enemy's columns of attack. Thereupon he galloped back to our main army and cried:

"My boys! It is not now in the defile that we are to await these barbarians—we shall have to fight them in the open field. Fall upon them from the height of the plateau that they are seeking to climb—drive their hordes into the Rhine! They are three to our one—so much the better! This evening, when we shall be back in camp, our mother, Victoria, will say to us: 'Children, you were brave!'"

At these words, Rolla, the druid bard, improvised the following war song, which he struck up with a powerful, resonant voice:

"This morning we say:—
'How many are there of these barbarous hordes,
Who thievishly aspire to rob us of land,
Of homes, of wives, and of sunshine?
Yes, how many are there of these Franks?'

"This evening we'll say:—
'Make answer, thou sod, red drenched
In the blood of the stranger;
Make answer, ye deep-rolling waves of the Rhine;
Make answer, ye crows that flutter for carrion,
Make answer—make answer!
How many were they,
These robbers of land, of homes, of wives and of sunshine?
Aye, how many were there,
Of these blood-thirsty, ravenous Franks?'"

And the several detachments of our troops ran up the plateau at the double quick to the refrain of the chant that flew from mouth to mouth until it reached the rearmost ranks.

Our army was promptly deployed on the crest of the plateau that dominated the vast plain whose edge was bordered by the curve of the Rhine in the distant horizon. Instead of awaiting the attack from that advantageous position, Victorin wished, by sheer audacity, to terrify the enemy. Despite our numerical inferiority, he issued the orders to pounce down upon the Franks from the crest of our elevated position. At the same moment, the enemy's column, which, deceived by the feigned retreat of our cohorts, had allowed itself to be lured into the defile, was being hurled back into the plain by the Gallic troops which confronted them. Our whole army thereupon reassumed the offensive, and not unlike an avalanche our full forces poured down from the summit of the plateau. The battle began; it was engaged all along the line.

I promised Victoria not to leave the side of her son. Nevertheless, such was the impetuosity with which, from the very start of the action, he dashed upon the enemy at the head of a legion of cavalry, that the flux and reflux of the

melee at first separated me from him. We were at the time engaged hand to hand with a picked, well mounted and well armed body of Franks. Their soldiers wore neither casque nor cuirass; but their double jackets of hides covered with long hair and their iron-lined fur caps, were the equivalent of our own armor. These Franks fought with fury, often with stupid ferocity. I saw several allow themselves to be killed like animals while, at the hottest of the battle, they madly sought to hack off the head of some fallen Gaul with their axes in order to make to themselves a trophy of the gory spoils. I was defending myself against two of these horsemen, and my hands were full; a third barbarian, a warrior who had been unhorsed and disarmed, clinched my leg and sought to pull me off the saddle, and as he found his efforts vain bit me with such rage in the ankle that his teeth cut through the leather of my gaiter and penetrated to the very bone. Without neglecting my two mounted adversaries, I found time to deal a blow with my mace upon this third Frank's skull. Freed from him, I was vainly endeavoring to discover and join Victorin, when I descried Neroweg, the Terrible Eagle, only a few paces from me, in the melee which his gigantic stature overtowered. At the sight of that man, there thronged to my mind the recollection of the outrageous insults heaped upon me only the day before, which I had only partly avenged by smiting him over the head with a firebrand; my blood, already warm with the ardor of the fray, now seethed. Over and above the anger that Neroweg inspired in me by reason of his cowardly insults of the previous day, I experienced for the man an unexplainable, mysterious, profound hatred. It was as if I saw in him the incarnation of that thievish and ferocious race that sought to

subjugate us. It was to me, strange and unaccountable as it may seem, as if I abhorred Neroweg by reason of the future as much as of the present; as if that hatred was to perpetuate itself not only between our two races of Franks and Gauls, but also between our families, individually. What shall I say to you, my child! I even forgot the promise I made to my foster-sister of watching over her son. Instead of any longer striving to find and join Victorin, I now only strove to draw close to Neroweg. I was bent upon having that Frank's life—he alone, among so many other enemies, incited in me personally the thirst for blood. I happened at the time to find myself surrounded by several horsemen of the legion at the head of which Victorin had just charged the Frankish army with such impetuosity. Our troops were steadily pushing forward at that point, the enemy was being crowded towards the Rhine. Two of the soldiers in front of me fell under the heavy francisque of the Terrible Eagle. I now saw him across that human breach.

Clad in a Gallic armor, the spoils of one of our captains who was killed at one of the previous battles, Neroweg wore a casque of gilded bronze, the visor of which partly covered his face, tattooed in blue and scarlet. His long copper colored beard reached down to the iron corselet that he had donned over his jacket of hides. Thick fleeces of sheep, held fast by criss-crossing strips of cloth, covered his legs from the thighs down to the feet. He rode a savage stallion from the forests of Germany, whose pale yellow coat was spotted with black. The tufts of the animal's thick mane fell below his square chest; his long tail, that streamed in the wind, lashed his sinewy haunches when he reared impatient under the restraint of his bit and silver-wrought reins, also the

proceeds of some Gallic spoils. A wooden buckler ribbed with iron and roughly painted in yellow and red stripes, the colors of Neroweg's banner, covered the left arm of the Terrible Eagle. In his right hand he wielded his heavy francisque that now dripped blood. From his belt hung a sort of large butcher's knife with a wooden handle, together with a magnificent Roman sword with a hilt of chased gold, doubtlessly the fruit of some raid. Neroweg emitted a roar of rage as he recognized me. Rising in his stirrups he cried out:

"The man of the bay horse!"

Thereupon, striking the flank of his courser with the flat of his axe, he caused the animal to clear with an enormous leap both the bodies and mounts of the fallen horsemen who lay between us. The leap was so violent that when his horse touched ground again, the animal's head and chest struck the head and chest of my own mount. At the heavy shock the two animals were thrown upon their haunches and both fell over. Dazed at first by my fall, I quickly disengaged myself, took my stand firmly upon my feet and drew my sword, my mace having slipped from my hands with my fall. On his part, having had to disentangle himself from under his horse, as I was forced to do, Neroweg also rose to his feet and precipitated himself upon me. The chin-band of his casque had snapped with his fall, his head was bare, his thick red hair, tied over his head, floated behind him like the mane of a horse.

"Ha! This time, you Gallic dog," he cried out as he ground his teeth and aimed at me with his axe a furious blow that I parried, "this time I shall have your life and your skin!"

"And I, Frankish wolf, I shall once more put my mark on your face, whether dead or alive, so that the devil will recognize you!"

For a long time we fought with maddening fury, all the while exchanging insults that redoubled our rage.

"Dog!" cried Neroweg. "You carried off my sister!"

"I took her from your infamous love! In the bestiality of your unclean race it couples like animals—brother with sister!"

"Dare you insult my race, you bastard dog! Half Roman, half Gallic! My race will subjugate yours, vile revolted slaves! We shall clap the yoke back upon your necks—and we shall take possession of your goods, your lands, and your wives!"

"Just look yonder at your routed army, Oh, great king! Just take a look at your packs of Frankish wolves, as cowardly as they are ferocious—just look at them, fleeing from the fangs of the Gallic dogs!"

It was in the midst of such torrents of invectives that we fought with heightening rage without either being able to wound the other. Many a furiously aimed blow had glided harmlessly down our cuirasses; we seemed to manage our swords with equal dexterity. Suddenly and despite all the maddened rage of our duel, a strange spectacle drew away our attention for an instant. After our horses had rolled to the ground under the shock that they both received, they also rose to their feet. Immediately, as is usually the case with stallions, they rushed at each other neighing wildly, and with flashing eyes sought to tear each other to pieces. My brave Tom-Bras had raised himself on his haunches, and, holding the other steed by the neck between his teeth, was

frantically battering his belly with his hoofs. Nettled at seeing his horse at the mercy of mine, Neroweg cried out without either he or I intermitting our battle:

"Folg! Will you allow that Gallic swine to vanquish you? Defend yourself with your hoofs and teeth! Tear him to pieces!"

"Steady, Tom-Bras!" I cried out in turn. "Disfigure and kill that horse, as I shall disfigure and kill his master."

I had hardly uttered these words when the Frank's sword penetrated my thigh between skin and flesh, and it did so at the very moment when I dealt him a blow over the head that would have been mortal but for the backward move that Neroweg made in withdrawing his sword from my thigh. My weapon thus missed its full aim, but struck him over the eye, and, by a singular accident, plowed his face on the side opposite the one which already bore my mark.

"I told you so! Dead or living the other side of your face would be also marked by me!" I cried at the moment when Neroweg, whose eye was put out by my blow and whose face was bathed in blood, precipitated himself upon me, roaring with pain and rage like an infuriated lion. Having calmly made up my mind to kill the man, I did not allow myself to be carried away with elation, but met his wrathful onset by throwing myself on the defensive, and watched for the opportunity to deal him a certain and mortal wound.

We were thus engaged when Neroweg's stallion rolled to the ground under the feet of Tom-Bras, whose rage seemed to increase with his success. The animal almost fell upon us. Half a foot nearer, and we would both have been thrown off our feet.

At the same instant, a legion of our reserve cavalry, the

muffled sound of whose approaching tramp had struck my ears shortly before, hove in sight. In the impetuosity of its headlong dash, the heavily armed cavalry legion rode rough-shod and trampled over everything that lay in its path. The legion was three ranks deep, and approached with the swiftness of a gale. Both Neroweg and myself were doomed to be crushed to dust; the legion's line of battle was two hundred paces long; even if I had time to leap upon my horse, it would have been next to impossible to get in time out of the way of that long line of cavalry by endeavoring to ride, however swiftly, beyond the reach of either of its wings. Escape seemed impossible from the threatened shock. Nevertheless, I undertook it, despite my chagrin at not having been allowed time to despatch the Frankish king—so inveterate was my hatred of him! I took quick advantage of the accident, that, due to the fall of Neroweg's horse, interrupted our battle a second before, and I leaped upon the back of Tom-Bras that was near me. It required a rude handling of the reins and of the flat of my sword before I could cause my courser to desist from his infuriated assault upon the other stallion that he held under and kicked and bit unmercifully. Finally I succeeded. The long line of cavalry reaching far to my right and left was now only a few paces from me. I rushed ahead of it, adding with my voice and my spurs to the speed of Tom-Bras's rapid gallop; I rode on, keeping well in the lead of the legion, and from time to time casting a look behind to see the Frankish king, and what became of him. With his visage streaming blood he sought distractedly to run after me and wildly brandished his sword. Suddenly I saw him vanish in the cloud of dust raised by the rapid gallop of the legion of cavalry.

"Hesus hearkened to my prayer!" I cried out. "Neroweg must be dead. The legion has trampled over his body."

Thanks to Tom-Bras's exceptional swiftness, I was soon far enough in advance of the cavalry line that followed me to think of imparting to my course a direction that enabled me to take my place to the right of the legion's line. I immediately addressed one of the officers, inquiring after Victorin and the turn of the battle. He answered:

"Victorin is fighting like a hero. A rider who brought to our reserve the orders to advance said to us that never before did the general reveal such consummate skill in his manoeuvres. Being more than twice our numbers, and above all displaying unwonted military skill, the Franks fought stubbornly. All the indications are that the day is ours, but it shall have been paid for dearly. Thousands of Gauls will have bitten the dust."

The officer's report was correct. Victorin again fought with a soldier's intrepidity and the consummate skill of an experienced general. I found him, his heart overflowing with joy, in the midst of the melee. Miraculously enough, he had received only a slight wound. His reserve forces, skilfully managed by him, decided the fate of the battle. The routed Franks, rolled back three leagues with our triumphant forces pressing close upon their heels, were being crowded towards the Rhine despite the stubbornness of their retreat. After enormous losses a portion of their hordes were hurled headlong into the river, others succeeded in regaining their rafts in disorder, and in towing them with their barks from the shore. But at that moment the flotilla of a hundred and sixty large vessels fell upon the fleeing Franks on the river. Upon orders from Victorin, the flotilla had sped forward,

doubled a tongue of land behind which it had kept itself concealed until then, and came into action. After a number of volleys of arrows that threw the Franks on the rafts into utter demoralization, our barks boarded the rafts from all sides. The episode that took place on the floating battlefield was the last, but not the least bloody of that day. The barks that towed the Frankish rafts were sunk under the blows of battle axes; the small number of Franks who survived this supreme struggle gave themselves over to the mercy of the river; clinging to some of the planks that were loosened from their rafts, they were carried helplessly down stream.

Although cruelly decimated, still our army thrilled with the ardor of the fray as, massed along the bluffs of the river, it witnessed the enemy's disastrous rout, upon which the rays of the westering sun shed their parting light. At that sublime moment, the soldiers struck up in chorus the heroic chant of the bard to the words and melody of which they had stepped to battle in the morning:

"This morning we say:—
'How many are there of these barbarous hordes,
Who thievishly aspire to rob us of land,
Of homes, of wives, and of sunshine?
Yes, how many are there of these Franks?'

"This evening we'll say:—
'Make answer, thou sod, red drenched
In the blood of the stranger;
Make answer, ye deep-rolling waves of the Rhine;
Make answer, ye crows that flutter for carrion,
Make answer—make answer!
How many were they,
These robbers of land, of homes, of wives and of sunshine?
Aye, how many were there,
Of these blood-thirsty, ravenous Franks?'"

The last strophes of the refrain were falling from the lips of our soldiers when, from the other side of the river—which was so wide at that place that the opposite bank could hardly be distinguished, veiled moreover, as it was by the rising evening haze—I noticed a gleam that, rapidly gaining in brightness and extent, soon spanned the horizon like the reflection of a gigantic conflagration.

Victorin immediately cried:

"Our brave Marion has carried out his plans at the head of his picked men and the allied tribes on the other side of the Rhine. He marched with them upon the camp of the Franks. The last reserve force of the barbarians must have been cut to pieces, and their huts and wagons given over to the flames! By Hesus! Rid at last of the neighborhood of those savage marauders, Gaul will now enjoy the sweets of a friendly peace! Oh, my mother! Your prayers have been heard!"

Victorin had just uttered these words with a face beaming with bliss, when I saw a considerable body of our soldiers belonging to different cavalry and infantry corps of the army marching slowly towards him. All of these soldiers were old men. Douarnek marched at their head. When the body had drawn near, Douarnek advanced alone a few steps and said in a grave and firm voice:

"Listen, Victorin! Each legion of cavalry, each cohort of infantry, chose its oldest soldier. They are the comrades who accompany me yonder. Like myself, they have known you from the day of your birth; like myself they have seen you as a baby in the arms of Victoria, the Mother of the Camps, the august mother of the soldiers. We long have loved you out of love both for her and yourself. We ac-

claimed you our general and one of the two Chiefs of Gaul. We, veterans in war, have loved you as our son while we obeyed you as our father. And then came the day when, ever obeying you as our general and a Chief of Gaul, our love for you was less—"

"And why did your love for me decline?" Victorin interrupted, struck by the solemn tone of the old soldier. "Why, pray, did your love for me decline?"

"Because we respected you less. But if you have faults, we also have ours; to-day's battle proves it to us. We have come to make the admission to you."

"Let us hear it," replied Victorin affectionately; "let us hear what are my faults and which are yours!"

"Your faults, Victorin, are these—you love too much, much more than is meet, both wine and pretty girls!"

"By all the sweethearts that you have had, my old Douarnek, by all the cups that you have emptied and that you will still empty, why such words on the evening of a battle that we have won?" merrily answered Victorin, who was slowly returning to his natural weakness, now no longer held under by concern for the battle. "In truth! There was no need for you and your comrades to put yourselves to the trouble of reproaching me with my peccadillos. Speak up frankly, are these reproaches that are usual from soldier to soldier?"

"From soldier to soldier, no, Victorin!" resumed Douarnek with severity, "but from soldier to general, yes! We freely chose you our chief; we must speak freely to you! The more we have loved you, you, young man, the more we have honored you, all the more are we entitled to say to you: Keep yourself at the height of your mission!"

"I endeavor to, brave Douarnek, by fighting at my best, by leading our legions in the hottest of the fray."

"All is not said when one has done his duty in battle. You are not a captain only, you are also a Chief of Gaul!"

"Be it so! But why, in the name of all the devils, do you imagine, my brave Douarnek, that as a general and a Chief of Gaul I should be less sensitive than a soldier to the splendor of two beautiful black or blue eyes, or to the bouquet of good old white or red wine?"

"The man chosen by free men should, even in matters that appertain to his private life, observe wise moderation if he wishes to be beloved, obeyed and respected. Have you observed such moderation? No! And accordingly, having seen you swallow a pea, we have believed you capable of gulping down an ox. It is in that that we did wrong!"

"What! My boys!" the young general replied smiling. "Did you really think I had such a maw as to be able to swallow a whole ox?"

"We often saw you in your cups—we knew you to be a runner after girls. We were told that on one occasion, being intoxicated, you violated a woman, a tavern-keeper's wife on one of the isles of the Rhine, who thereupon killed herself in despair. We believed the story. Were we perhaps mistaken in that?"

"Malediction!" cried Victorin indignantly and with grief depicted on his face. "And you believed such a thing of my mother's son!"

"Yes," answered the veteran, "yes—in that lay the wrong that we did. So that we each did wrong—you and we. We have come to notify you that we are ready to forget the past, and that our hearts remain loyal to you. We wish you, in

turn, to forgive us, so that we may love you and you us as in the past. Is it agreed, Victorin?"

"Yes," answered Victorin, deeply moved by the veteran's loyal and touching words; "it is agreed."

"Your hand!" replied Douarnek, "in the name of our comrades."

"Here it is," said the young general, stooping down over his horse's neck in order cordially to clasp the veteran's hand. "I thank you for your frankness, my children. I shall be to you as you are to me for the glory and peace of Gaul. Without you I can do nothing; although it is the general who carries the triumphal chaplet, it is the soldier's bravery that weaves it, and imparts to it the purple of his own blood!"

"It is, then, agreed, Victorin," Douarnek replied with moistening eyes. "Our blood belongs to you, to the last drop—and to our beloved Gaul—to your glory!"

"And to my mother who made me what I am," interrupted Victorin with increasing emotion; "and to my mother our respect, our love, our devotion, my children!"

"Long live the Mother of the Camps!" cried Douarnek in a resonant voice. "Long live Victorin, her glorious son!"

Douarnek's companions, the rest of the soldiers and officers, in short, all of us present at this scene joined in the cheers of Douarnek:

"Long live the Mother of the Camps! Long live Victorin, her glorious son!"

The whole army thereupon set itself in march back to the camp while, under the protection of a legion that was ordered to watch our prisoners, the medical druids and their aides remained on the field of battle to gather the dead, and tend the wounded, both Frank and Gallic.

It was a superb summer's night, that in which the army struck the road to Mayence. As it marched, the banks of the Rhine re-echoed to the chant of the bard:

"This morning we say:—
'How many are there of these barbarous hordes,
Who thievishly aspire to rob us of land,
Of homes, of wives and of sunshine?
Yes, how many are there of these Franks?'

"This evening we'll say:—
'Make answer, thou sod, red drenched
In the blood of the stranger;
Make answer, ye deep-rolling waves of the Rhine;
Make answer, ye crows that flutter for carrion,
Make answer—make answer!
How many were they,
These robbers of land, of homes, of wives and of sunshine?
Aye, how many were there,
Of these blood-thirsty, ravenous Franks?'"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE HOMEWARD RIDE.

In his haste to inform his mother of our splendid victory, Victorin passed the command of the troops to one of the oldest chiefs. We changed our tired horses for two fresh ones which were always led by the reins ready for Victorin's use, and he and I rode rapidly towards Mayence.

The night was serene; the moon shone superbly among myriads of stars—those unknown worlds where we shall proceed to live when we leave this world. Strange! In the very midst of the ineffable bliss that I experienced at the triumph of our army, a triumph that insured the peace and prosperity of Gaul; in the very midst of the pleasurable thoughts of soon again seeing your mother and you, my son, after a hard day's fighting; in the very midst of all these pleasing emotions a sudden fit of profound melancholy came over me, a painful presentiment saddened my heart.

In the fulness of my gratitude to the gods, I had raised my eyes to heaven in order to thank them for our success. The moon shed its brilliant light upon our path. I know not for what reason, but that moment my thoughts traveled back to our ancestors, and I recalled with sad piety all the glorious, the touching and the terrible deeds that they had done, and upon which also the sacred luminary of Gaul shed its never-ceasing light generations and generations ago. The

sacrifice of Hena; the journey of Albinik the mariner and his wife Meroë to Caesar's camp, across a region that was heroically given up to the flames by our fathers during their war with the Romans; the nocturnal expeditions of Sylvest the slave to the secret meetings of the Sons of the Mistletoe and to the palace of Faustina, his escape and flight from the circus of Orange where he came near being devoured by ferocious beasts; and finally the bold insurrections, the formidable revolts, the signal for which was ever given by the courses of the moon, as prearranged by our venerable druids; all these events that lay in the distant past rose at that moment before my mind like pale phantoms of the past.

The merry voice of Victorin drew me from my meditations:

"What are you dreaming about? How can you, one of the vanquishers in this fair day's battle, be as mute as one of the vanquished?"

"Victorin, I was thinking of days that are no more—of events that took place during the centuries that have rolled by—"

"A curious thought!" replied the young general; and giving a loose to his exuberant feelings he proceeded to say: "Let us leave the past to the empty cups and the departed sweethearts! As for me, I am thinking first of all of my mother's joy when she will learn of our victory; next, my thoughts run, and they run strongly, upon the burning black eyes of Kidda the Bohemian girl, who is waiting for me. When I left her this morning, at the close of the protracted banquet to which she drew me by a ruse, she made an appointment with me for this evening. This will be a well rounded day, Schanvoch! A battle in the morning, and, in the evening, a festive supper with a charming sweetheart on

my knees! Ah! It is pleasurable to be a soldier and twenty years of age!"

"Listen, Victorin. So long as the cares of battle lay upon your mind, I saw you wise, thoughtful and grave, as becomes a Chief of Gaul, and at all points worthy of your mother and yourself—"

"And by the beautiful eyes of Kidda, am I not still worthy of myself when my thoughts turn to her after battle?"

"Do you know, Victorin, that Douarnek's mission to you in the name of the whole army is an evidence of the proud independence that animates our soldiers, whose free will alone made you a general? Do you realize that such words, pronounced by such men, are not, and will not be vain—and that it will be fatal to forget them?"

"Why, Schanvoch! It was a whim of veterans who grieve over their lost youth—old men's words, censuring pleasures that their age can no longer taste."

"Victorin, you affect an indifference that your heart does not share. I saw you touched, deeply affected by the language of that old soldier—and also by the attitude of his comrades."

"One feels so happy on the evening of a battle won, that everything pleases. Besides, although his words were peevish enough, did they not betoken the army's affection for me?"

"Do not deceive yourself, Victorin! The army's affection for you ebbed—it returned at floodtide with to-day's great victory. But, be careful! Fresh acts of imprudence will furnish the basis for fresh calumnies, started by those who would wish to undo you—"

"And who wishes to undo me?"

"A chief always has rivals who envy him secretly; and you

will not have every day a triumph on the battle field to confound those envious souls with. Thanks to the gods, the utter annihilation of these barbarous hordes insures the peace of our beloved Gaul for many a year to come!"

"All the better, Schanvoch! All the better! Becoming again one of Gaul's most obscure citizens, and hanging my sword, that will have become useless, beside that of my father, I shall then be free to empty innumerable cups without restraint, and to make love to all the Bohemian girls of the universe!"

"Victorin! Be careful, I repeat! Remember the words of the old soldier!"

"The devil take the old soldier and his foolish harangue! At this hour I think only of Kidda! Ah! Schanvoch, if you only saw her dance with her short skirt and her silvery corsage!"

"Be careful! Both the camp and the town have their eyes upon those Bohemian dancers! Your friendly relations with them will make a scandal! Take my advice! Be reserved in your conduct; at any rate, veil your amours in secrecy and obscurity!"

"Obscurity? Secrecy? No hypocrisy! I love to display to the eyes of all, the sweethearts that I am proud of! And I am even prouder of Kidda than of to-day's victory!"

"Victorin! Victorin! Be careful, or that woman will be fatal to you!"

"Oh! Schanvoch! If you heard Kidda sing and dance, accompanying herself with a tambourine—Oh! If you heard and saw her you would become as crazily in love with her as I am! But," added the young general breaking off the thread of his delighted description, and pointing ahead of him,

"look at yonder torches! Heaven be praised! It is my mother! In her anxiety to know the issue of the day she must have ridden out towards the battle field! Oh, Schanvoch! I am young, impetuous, ardent after pleasures, that never leave me. I enjoy them with the delight of intoxication—and yet, I swear to you by my father's sword, I would exchange all my future pleasures for the happiness that I am about to experience when my mother will press me to her heart!"

Saying this, the young general gave the reins to his horse and without waiting for me rode forward to meet Victoria, who was, indeed, approaching. When I reached the group, they had both alighted. Victoria held Victorin in a close embrace, and was saying to him in accents impossible to describe:

"My son, I am a happy mother!"

It was only then that I perceived by the light of the torches of Victoria's escort that her right hand was bandaged. Victorin inquired with anxiety:

"Are you wounded, mother?"

"Only slightly," answered Victoria. And addressing me she extended her hand affectionately, saying:

"Brother, you are with us! My heart overflows with joy!"

"But who gave you the wound?"

"The Frankish woman whom Ellen and Sampso brought to my house after your departure—"

"Elwig!" I cried horrified. "Oh! The accursed creature! She has approved herself worthy of her race!"

"Schanvoch," Victoria said to me gravely, "we must not curse the dead. She whom you call Elwig lives no more—"

"Mother!" cried Victorin with increased anxiety. "Dear mother! Are you certain the wound is slight?"

"Here, my son; I shall let you see it!"

And in order to reassure Victorin, she unwound the bandage in which her right hand was wrapped.

"You can see for yourself," she added. "I cut myself only in two places in the palm of my hand as I sought to disarm the woman."

Indeed, the wounds that my foster-sister exhibited were two long but by no means deep cuts. They were in no respect serious.

"And Elwig was armed?" I inquired, seeking to recollect the events of the previous evening. "Where could she have found a weapon? Unless last evening, before starting to swim after us, she picked up her knife from the beach and hid it under her clothes."

"And how and when did the woman try to stab you, mother? Were you alone with her?"

"I asked Schanvoch to have Elwig brought to me at noon; I wanted to see her and give her my help. Ellen and Sampso brought her to me. I happened to be speaking with Robert, the chief of our reserves; we were considering measures for the defense of the camp and town in the event of our army's defeat. Elwig was taken to a contiguous apartment, and Schanvoch's wife and sister-in-law left the stranger alone while I sent for an interpreter to help us understand each other. At the close of my conversation with Robert on military matters, he asked me for some help for the widow of an old soldier. That took me to the chamber where Elwig was waiting for me. I went in for some silver pieces which I kept in a little casket in which were also several Gallic

jewels, necklaces and bracelets that I inherited from my mother—"

"If the casket was open," I cried, the savage cupidity of Neroweg's sister flashing through my mind, "Elwig, like the true daughter of a race of thieves, must have wished to seize some of the precious articles."

"And that was how it happened, Schanvoch. When I entered, the young Frankish woman was holding in her hand a gold necklace of exquisite workmanship. She was contemplating it greedily. The moment she saw me she dropped the necklace at her feet, and crossing her arms over her breast she looked at me for a moment in silence and with a savage expression. Her pale face became red with shame and rage. She then gave me a somber look, and pronounced my name. I supposed she asked whether I was Victoria. I nodded my head affirmatively and said: 'Yes, I am Victoria.' I had hardly uttered the words when Elwig threw herself at my feet. Her forehead almost touched the floor, as if she humbly implored my protection. The woman must doubtlessly have profited by the movement to draw her knife from under her clothes without my perceiving it. I stooped down to raise her, when she suddenly leaped up, and with eyes that shot fire sought to stab me, while saying 'Victoria!' 'Victoria!' in a tone of rooted hatred."

Although the danger was over, Victorin shuddered at the report that his mother was making; he approached her, gently took the wounded hand between his own, and kissed it tenderly and lovingly.

"When I saw Elwig's knife raised over me," added Victoria, "my first and involuntary movement was to parry the blow and try to seize the knife, while I cried aloud to Robert

for help. Robert rushed in and saw me struggling with Elwig. I was cut in the hand and my blood flowed. Robert believed me dangerously wounded, drew his sword, seized Elwig by the throat, and despatched her before I had time to stay his hand. I deplore the death of the Frankish woman—she came voluntarily to my house."

"You pity her, mother!" cried Victorin. "That creature thievish and savage like the rest of her kith! You pity her! I feel certain that she followed Schanvoch only in order to find an opportunity to introduce herself into your house, cut your throat and then rob you!"

"I pity her for being born of such a stock," answered Victoria sadly. "I pity her for having harbored murder in her heart."

"Believe me," I said to my foster-sister. "That woman's death is a just punishment; besides it puts an end to a life that was soiled with crimes at which nature shudders. May it have pleased the gods that, like Elwig, her brother Neroweg lost his life to-day, and that his stock may be extinguished in him. I will otherwise regret all my life that I did not finish the man when I had a chance. I have a presentiment that his descendants will be fatal to mine."

Victoria gave me a look of astonishment at hearing me utter these words, the sense of which she could not comprehend.

But Victorin turned her thoughts and mine into other channels, exclaiming:

"Hesus be blessed, mother! This was a happy day for Gaul! You escaped a grave danger, and our arms are victorious! The Franks are driven from our frontier!—"

Victorin broke off; he seemed to listen to a sound in the distance; with flashing eyes he resumed:

"Do you hear, mother? Do you hear the song that the wind carries to our ears?"

We all remained silent; and repeated in chorus by thousands of voices tremulous with the joy of triumph, the following refrain reached us across the stillness of the night:

"This morning we said:—
'How many are there of these barbarians?'
This evening we say:—
'How many were there of these blood-thirsty Franks?'"

PART II.

DOMESTIC TRAITORS.

CHAPTER I.

GATHERING SHADOWS.

Several years have elapsed since I wrote for you, my child, the account that closed with the great battle of the Rhine.

The utter annihilation of the Frankish hordes and the simultaneous destruction of their establishment on the other side of the river, freed Gaul of the perpetual fear that she stood in, of a threatened invasion of barbarians. Perhaps from their retreat in the woods of northern Germany the Franks are now only awaiting a favorable opportunity to swoop down again upon Gaul. But for all the joy of this deliverance, I now resume my narrative after having experienced years of bitter sorrow. Great misfortunes have befallen me across this interval. I have seen a frightful intrigue of hypocrisy and malice unfold before my eyes. Since then an incurable sadness has taken possession of my soul. I left the borders of the Rhine for Brittany; here I established myself with your second mother and you, my son, at the identical place that long ago was the cradle of our family—near the sacred stones of Karnak, the witnesses of the heroic sacrifice of our ancestress Hena.

Only yesterday, as I was returning from the fields with you—from a soldier I have become a field laborer like our fathers in the days of their independence—only yesterday I

pointed out to you, on the border of the stream, two hollow willow trees; they were old. Their age must now be more than three hundred years. They are so very, very old that they no longer put forth but a few straggling leaves. You asked me to tie a rope between the two trees for you to swing yourself. You noticed with surprise that I grew sad at your request, and that I suddenly became pensive.

It occurred to me how, nearly three hundred years ago, by a strange coincidence it occurred to Sylvest and his sister Syomara to tie a rope between those identical trees in order to disport themselves. Nor were, alas! those recollections the only ones that those two centenarian trunks brought back to my mind. I said to you:

"Look at those two trees with sadness and veneration, my son. One of our ancestors, Guilhern, the son of Joel, the brenn of the tribe of Karnak, died an atrocious death bound to one of them; Guilhern's son, a lad a little older than yourself and named Sylvest, was tied to the other willow to die the same death as his father. An unexpected accident snatched him from the frightful fate."[1]

"And what was their crime?" you asked me.

"The crime of the father and of his son was to have tried to escape from bondage, so as not to be forced to cultivate under a master's whip, with the slave's collar on their necks and chains to their feet, the fields that were their own patrimony. They wished to escape cultivating those fields for the benefit of the Romans who had robbed them of them."

My answer astonished you still more, my child—you who always lived happy and free, who until now have known no other grief than that of the loss of your dear mother, of

[1] For the source of these recollections, see the third volume of this series, entitled "The Iron Collar."

whom you have preserved only a vague memory. You were barely four years and two months old a short time after the victory that Gaul won over the Franks on the border of the Rhine.

You will remember that I broke off our conversation, and that I relapsed into one of those fits of melancholy that I find it impossible to overcome every time I recall the terrible domestic catastrophes that befell us on the Rhine. But I always regain courage when I remember the duty imposed upon me by our ancestor Joel, who lived nearly three hundred years ago in the same place where we are now again established after our family's having experienced innumerable vicissitudes.

When you will be old enough to read these pages, my son, you will understand the cause of these mortal fits of sadness in which you have often seen me steeped, despite your second mother's tenderness, whom I could not cherish too dearly. Yes, when you will have read the last and solemn words of Victoria, the Mother of the Camps, dreadful words, you will then understand that, however painful may be to me the past that will throw a shadow over my path until death, the future that is perhaps in store for Gaul by the mysterious will of Hesus, must fill me with still greater anguish—and you will share my anguish, my son, when you reflect over the wise and profound observation of our ancestor Sylvest:

"Alas, every time the nation is wounded the family bleeds."

Aye, if Victoria was endowed with the science of foreseeing the future, as so many of our venerable female druids have been before her; if ever her redoubtable prophecies are verified—then, woe is Gaul! Woe is our race! Woe is our family! A longer period of even more cruel sufferings will

lie before our country under the yoke of the Rome of the Bishops than it experienced under the yoke of the Rome of the Caesars and the Emperors!

As I said before, I now resume the thread of my narrative where I dropped it several years ago.

After an extensive conversation on the events of the day, Victorin and his mother returned to Mayence, where they arrived late in the evening. Pretending great fatigue and some pain from the light wound that he received, the young general retired. The moment he reached his house he threw off his armor, and wrapping himself in his cloak repaired to the Bohemian girls.

"That woman will be fatal to you," were my words to the young general on our way from the battle field. Alas! My foresight was destined to prove true. By the way of these creatures, keep in mind, my son, a circumstance with which I later became acquainted; you will presently appreciate its importance—those Bohemian girls came to Mayence two days after the arrival of Tetrik in the same town, and they arrived from Gascony, the department that he governed.

This discovery, together with many others, imparted to me such accurate information on certain facts that I am enabled to describe them the same as if I had been present.

As I said, Victorin left his house at night to keep his assignation with Kidda, the Bohemian girl. He had met her only the previous evening for the first time. She made a deep impression upon him. He was young, handsome, bright and generous. That very day he had won a glorious battle. He was well aware of the easy morals of those strolling singers, who, in effect, were nothing but courtesans. He felt cer-

tain that he would possess the object of this latest whim. How great must his surprise have been when Kidda said to him with well simulated firmness, sadness and repressed passion:

"Victorin, I shall not speak to you of my virtue; you will laugh at the virtue of a strolling Bohemian singer. But you may believe me when I say that long before I saw you, your glorious name had reached me. Your renown for valor and goodness made my heart beat, unworthy of you as that heart is, seeing that I am a poor, degraded creature. Believe me, Victorin," she added with tears in her eyes, "if I were pure, you would have my love and my life; but I am soiled; I do not deserve your attention. I love you too passionately, I honor you too much ever to offer to you the remains of an existence debased by men, who are not worthy of being compared with you."

So far from cooling, the hypocritical language fired the ardor of Victorin; it exalted him beyond measure. His sensual whim for the woman was speedily transformed into a consuming and mad passion. Despite his protestations of devotion, despite his entreaties, despite his tears—he actually wept at the feet of the execrable woman—the Bohemian remained inexorable. Victorin's nature underwent thereupon a marked change. From mirthful, pleasant and open, it became retired and morose. He grew somber and taciturn. Both his mother and I were ignorant at the time of the cause of the change. To our pressing questions the young general would answer that, being struck by the manifestations of displeasure that the army had shown towards him, he did not wish to expose himself to a recurrence of their anger; thenceforth his life was to be austere and retired. With the exception of a few hours that he consecrated every day to his

mother, Victorin now rarely left his house, and he avoided the company of his former boon companions. Struck, on their part, by his sudden change of deportment, the soldiers saw in it only the salutary effect of the remonstrances made to their young general in their name by Douarnek. They cherished him more than ever before. I later learned that, in his self-imposed solitude, the unhappy man habitually drank himself into utter stupor in order to forget his fatal passion, and that every evening he repaired to the Bohemian dancer's, only, however, to find her pitiless as ever.

About a month passed in this manner. Tetrik remained in Mayence in order to overcome Victoria's repugnance to the idea of having her grandson acclaimed the heir of his father's office. But Victoria ever answered the Governor of Gascony, saying:

"Ritha-Gaur, who made himself a blouse of the beard of the kings whom he shaved, overthrew royalty in Gaul about ten centuries ago. He held that, under royalty, it is the people and their descendants who are transmitted by hereditary right, to kings, and that these are rarely good, and generally bad. More and more enlightened by our venerable druids, the Gauls have wisely preferred to elect the chief whom they consider worthiest to govern them. They thus constituted themselves into a Republic. My grandson is still a child in his cradle; no one can know whether he will later have the qualities that are necessary for the government of a great people like ours. To acknowledge this child to-day as the heir of his father's office is tantamount to restoring the royalty that we have wisely overthrown. I hate royalty as much as did Ritha-Gaur."

Still hoping to overcome the resolution of the Mother of

the Camps by his persistence, Tetrik prolonged his stay in Mayence—at least I was long under the impression that such was the only reason for his postponing his departure. Nor did Tetrik seem to be less surprised at the unaccountable change that came over Victorin. The latter, although plunged in brooding sadness, still preserved his affection for me. I even thought that more than once he was on the point of opening his heart to me and of confiding to me what he there kept hidden. Later, however, he ceased calling at my house as he formerly used to, and seemed even to avoid meeting me. His features, once so handsome and open, were no longer the same. Pale with suffering, worn by excessive and solitary indulgence in wine, their expression gradually assumed a sinister aspect. At times a sort of dementia seemed to speak out of his alternately fixed and wandering gaze.

About five weeks after the great battle of the Rhine, Victorin resumed his visits to my house. The turn was marked, both in point of suddenness and assiduity. Noticeable was the circumstance that the hours which he chose for his visits were those during which Sampso and my wife were home alone, I being at Victoria's writing the letters which she dictated. Ellen received the son of my foster-sister with her wonted affability. At first I imagined that, sorry at having kept himself away from me without cause and by a mere whim, he sought to bring about a reconciliation by means of my wife. I believed this all the more seeing that, despite his persistence in seeking to avoid me, he never spoke of me to Ellen except in terms of deep affection. Sampso was usually present at the conversations between her sister and Victorin. Only once did she leave them alone, and then, when she returned she was struck by the painful expression on my

wife's face and the visible embarrassment shown by Victorin, who speedily took his departure.

"What is the matter, Ellen?" asked Sampso.

"Sister, I conjure you, never again leave me alone with Victoria's son. May it please the gods that I am mistaken! But to judge from some broken words that Victorin let drop, to judge by the expression of his face, I imagine that he is moved by a guilty love for me—and yet he is aware of my devotion to Schanvoch!"

"Sister!" exclaimed Sampso, "Victorin's excesses have ever shocked me, but latterly he seems to have changed. The sacrifice of his unregulated pleasures doubtlessly costs him much; notwithstanding the young general's changed conduct is praised by everyone, they all comment on his profound sadness. I can not believe him capable of thinking of dishonoring your husband, who loves Victorin as if he were his own child, and who even saved his life in battle. You must be mistaken, Ellen! No! Such baseness is not possible!"

"I only hope you are right, Sampso; nevertheless, I must conjure you not to leave me alone with Victorin if he comes again. At any rate, I mean to tell all to Schanvoch."

"Be careful, Ellen. If, as I believe, you are mistaken, you would but raise a frightful and unjustified suspicion in your husband's breast. You know how attached he is to Victoria and her son. Only imagine Schanvoch's despair at such a revelation! Ellen, follow my advice, receive Victorin once more alone. Should your suspicions grow into certainty, then, hesitate no longer—reveal Victorin's treachery to Schanvoch. It would otherwise be imprudent on your part to awaken in him suspicions that may be wholly baseless. An

infamous hypocrite, however, should be unmasked, when there is no longer any doubt as to his purpose."

Ellen promised her sister to follow her advice. But Victorin never returned. I learned all these details only later. This happened in the course of the fifth or sixth week after the great battle of the Rhine, and exactly eight days before the catastrophe that it is my duty, my son, to relate to you.

On that fateful day I spent the early part of the evening near Victoria conferring with her upon an urgent mission on which I was to depart on that very evening, and which might keep me several days from home. Although Victorin promised his mother to be present at the conference, the purpose of which was known to him, he remained away. I did not wonder at his absence. For some time, and without its being possible for me to fathom his whimsical conduct, he had avoided all opportunity of encountering me. Victoria said to me pathetically when I left her at the usual hour:

"Private feelings must be hushed before interests of state. I have spoken to you fully on the subject of the mission that I have charged you with, Schanvoch. And now the mother will unbosom her private grief. I had this morning a sad conversation with my son. I vainly implored him to confide to me the cause of the secret sorrow that is consuming him. He answered me with a distressful smile:

" 'Mother, one time you reproached me with my levity and my too strong taste for pleasures—those days are now far behind—I now live in solitude and meditation. My lodging, where formerly the joyful din of song and revelry by torch light used to keep the night astir, is now lonely, silent and somber—like myself. Our scrupulous soldiers feel edified at my conversion, and now no longer reproach me with too

much love for joy, wine and women! What more do you want, mother?'

"'I want much more,' I replied to him, unable to restrain my tears. 'I want to see you happy as in the past. You suffer, my son; you suffer a pain that you conceal from me. The consciousness of a wise and thoughtful life, as becomes the chief of a great people, imparts to his face a grave yet serene expression. Your face, however, is haggard, sinister, pale, like that of a man distracted and in despair—'"

"And what did Victorin say to that?"

"Nothing. He relapsed into the gloomy brooding in which I find him so often plunged, and from which he emerges only to cast wandering looks about. I then showed him his child, whom I held in my arms. He took it, kissed it several times with great tenderness, put it back into its cradle, and left abruptly without saying a word. I believe he wished to hide his tears from me. I saw that he wept. Oh! Schanvoch, my heart breaks when I think of the future that seemed to me so rosy for Gaul, for my son and for me!"

I sought to console Victoria by joining her in conjecturing the cause of her son's mysterious grief. The hour grew late. I was to travel all that night in order to fulfil my mission as promptly as possible. I left my foster-sister's and proceeded home in order to embrace your mother and you, my son, before starting on my journey.

CHAPTER II.

THE CATASTROPHE.

When I reached home, my son, I found your mother Ellen and her sister Sampso seated near your cradle. The moment Sampso saw me she cried:

"You arrive in time, Schanvoch, to help me convince Ellen that her fears are groundless—she is weeping—"

"What ails you, Ellen? What afflicts you?"

She dropped her head, made no answer, and continued weeping.

"She does not dare to admit to you the cause of her affliction, Schanvoch; my sister weeps because you are about to depart."

"What?" I asked Ellen in a tone of tender reproach, "you who are always so brave even when I leave for battle, are now timorous and tearful when I am only going on a peaceful journey that will not keep me away more than a few days—a journey into Gaul, where peace reigns! Ellen, your apprehensions are groundless."

"That is exactly what I have been repeating to my sister. Your journey does not expose you to any danger; and if you depart to-night it is because the matter is urgent."

"Yes, indeed! Why, it must be a positive pleasure to journey in the manner that I am about to do—on a mild

summer's night, across the smiling fields of our own beautiful country that is to-day so calm and peaceful!"

"I know all that," said Ellen in a tremulous voice. "My alarm is senseless; and yet this journey fills me with dread."

And stretching her arms towards me imploringly:

"Schanvoch, my beloved husband, do not depart; I conjure you—do not depart—"

"Ellen," I replied sadly, "for the first time in my life I am compelled to answer you with a refusal—"

"I beg you, stay near me!"

"I would sacrifice everything to you, my duty excepted. The mission with which I am charged by Victoria is important—I promised to fulfil it. I must keep my word."

"Well, then, go," answered my wife amid a paroxysm of sobs, "and let my fate come upon me; it is your will!"

"Sampso, what fate does she mean?"

"Alas! Since this morning my sister has been a prey to gloomy presentiments. She admitted them to be as unaccountable as I considered them myself, and yet she is unable to overcome them. She says she feels certain that she will never see you again—or that some grave peril threatens you during your journey."

"Ellen, my beloved wife," I said, clasping her to my heart, "need I tell you that, short as our separation may be, it is always hard for me to be away from you? Would you add to that sorrow, the even greater one of having to leave you in such a desolate state?"

"Pardon me," answered Ellen making a strong effort over herself. "You are right; such weakness is unworthy of the wife of a soldier. See; I have stopped weeping. I am calm; your words have reassured me; I am ashamed of my timorous

terrors; but in the name of our child who is now asleep in his cradle, do not go away annoyed at me. Let your good-bye caresses be tender as ever; I shall need that; yes, I shall need that in order to recover the courage that I am deficient in to-day."

Despite her apparent resignation, my wife seemed to suffer so much under the restraint that she imposed upon herself, that for a moment I thought of requesting Victoria to transfer the commission to Captain Marion, to the end that I might remain at home. One consideration held me back from putting the thought into execution; the time was too short. Seeing that the journey had to be undertaken that same night, Captain Marion could not possibly start on the spot. It would take hours in order to post the captain upon a matter of which he knew absolutely nothing, and which demanded promptness for success. Yielding to my duty, and, I must also say, convinced of the idleness of Ellen's fears, I decided to depart. I clasped her in my arms, and recommending her to the tender care of Sampso, I mounted my horse and rode off.

It was ten o'clock at night. A rider was to serve as my escort and messenger in case I had occasion to write to Victoria on the road. The rider was chosen for me by Captain Marion, to whom I applied for a reliable man; I found him ready, waiting for me at one of the gates of Mayence, and we trotted forth together. Although the moon was not to rise until late, the night was luminous by the light of the stars. I noticed, although without attaching at the time any importance to the circumstance, that, despite the mildness of the season, my traveling companion had on a heavy coat the hood of which fell down deep over his casque, so that even

in full daylight it would have been difficult for me to see the man's face. Although a simple soldier like myself, instead of riding beside me, he allowed me to ride ahead of him without exchanging a word. On any other occasion, and being like all Gauls of a chatty disposition, I would not have accepted this mark of exaggerated deference; it would have deprived me of the conversation of a companion during a long ride. But I was saddened by the condition in which I had left my wife, and as despite myself, my mind insisted upon turning upon the sad forebodings that alarmed her, the sense of sadness grew upon me in the measure that the distance separating us increased; consequently I did not regret being left to my reflections during a part of the night. Thus, the rider following me, we traveled away from the town.

We had ridden about two hours without exchanging a word; the moon due in the sky towards midnight began to show her disk behind a hill that bounded the horizon. We had arrived at a crossing where four highways, built by the Romans, met. I slackened Tom-Bras's pace in order to ascertain the road I was to take, when suddenly my traveling companion raised his voice behind me and cried:

"Schanvoch, ride back home at full tilt—a horrible crime is being committed at this hour in your house!"

At these words I quickly turned in my saddle. By the glamour of the rising moon I could see the rider give a stupendous bound with his horse, clear the hedge that lined the road, and vanish in the shadow of the forest that we had been skirting for some time. Struck dumb with terror, I remained motionless for a moment; when, yielding to an impulse of curiosity and anguish, I thought of dashing after the rider and compelling an explanation of his words, it was

too late. The moon was not yet far up enough to justify my pursuing the fugitive through the wood, which, moreover, was unknown to me. Besides, the rider had too much the lead of me. I listened intently for a moment, and I could hear in the profound stillness of the night the rapid gallop of the man's horse. He was far away. It seemed to me that he resumed the road to Mayence through the forest, consequently by a shorter route. For a moment I hesitated what to do. But recalling my wife's unaccountable forebodings and comparing them with the rider's words, I turned my horse's head and dashed back to the city.

"If," I thought to myself, "by some unconceivable accident the announcement to which I hearkened was as ill founded as Ellen's forebodings, with which, however, it strangely coincided; if my alarm turns out to be vain, I shall take a fresh horse at the camp and immediately resume my journey, which will have been delayed by three hours."

With voice and heels I urged on the rapid course of my horse Tom-Bras, and I rode headlong towards Mayence. In the measure that I approached the place where I left my wife and child, the gloomiest thoughts crowded upon me. What crime could it be that was being committed in my house? Was it to a friend, or was it to an enemy that I owed the revelation? At times I imagined the rider's voice was not unknown to me, yet I could not remember where I had heard it before. That which, above all, added fuel to my anxiety was the mysterious accord between the announcement just made to me and the presentiments that alarmed Ellen. The rising moon aided the swiftness of my course as it lighted the road. Trees, fields, houses vanished behind me with giddy swiftness. I consumed less than an hour in cov-

ering the same route that I had just spent two hours over. At last I reached the gates of Mayence. I felt Tom-Bras trembling under me, not for want of ardor or courage, but because his strength was spent. Seeing a soldier mounting guard, I said:

"Did you see a rider enter town this night?"

"About a quarter of an hour ago," the soldier answered, "a rider wrapped in a hooded mantle went by at a gallop. He rode towards the camp."

"It is he," I said to myself, and resumed my course at the risk of seeing Tom-Bras expire under me. There could be no doubt; my traveling companion made a short cut through the forest, but why did he proceed to the camp, instead of entering the town? A few moments later I arrived before my house. I leaped down from my horse that neighed gladly as he recognized the place. I ran to the door and knocked hard. No one opened to me, but I heard muffled cries within. Again I knocked with the handle of my sword, but in vain. The cries grew louder; I thought I heard Sampso's voice—I tried to break down the door—impossible. Suddenly the window of my wife's room was thrown open. I ran thither sword in hand. At the instant when I arrived at the casement, the shutters were pulled open from within. I rushed through the passage and found myself face to face with a man. The darkness prevented me from recognizing him. He was in the act of fleeing from Ellen's room, whose heartrending cries then reached my ears. To seize the man by the throat at the moment when he put his foot upon the window sill in order to escape, to throw him back into the pitch dark room, and to strike him several times with my sword while I cried: 'Ellen, here I am!'—all this happened

with the swiftness of thought. I drew my sword from the body that lay at my feet and was about to plunge it again into the carcass—my rage was uncontrollable—when I felt two arms clasp me convulsively. I thought myself attacked by a second adversary and forthwith ran the other body through. The arms that had been thrown around my neck immediately loosened their hold, and at the same time I heard these words pronounced by an expiring voice:

"Schanvoch—you have killed me—thanks, my friend—it is sweet to me to die at your hands—I would not have been able to survive my shame—"

It was Ellen's voice.

My wife had run, dumb with terror, to place herself under my protection. It was her arms that had clasped me. I heard her fall upon the floor. I remained thunder-struck. My sword dropped from my hand; for several seconds the silence of death reigned in the room that was perfectly dark except for a beam of pale light that fell from the moon through the lattice of one of the shutters that the wind had blown to. The shutter was suddenly thrown open again from without, and by the light of the moon I saw a tall and slender woman, clad in a short red skirt and a silvery corsage, resting with her knee upon the outer window sill and leaning her head into the room say:

"Victorin, handsome Tarquin of a new Lucretia, quit the house; the night is far advanced. I saw you enter the door at midnight, the hour agreed upon, the husband being away. You shall now leave your charmer's house by the window, the passage of lovers. You kept your promise—now I am yours. Come, my cart awaits us. Venus will protect us!"

"Victorin!" I cried horrified, believing myself the sport of a frightful nightmare. "It was he—I killed him!"

"The husband!" exclaimed Kidda, the Bohemian, leaping back. "It must be the devil that brought him back!"

And she vanished.

Immediately afterwards I heard the sound of a cart's wheels and the clinking of the bell of the mule that drew it rapidly away, while from another direction, from the quarter of the camp, I heard a distant roar that drew steadily nearer and resembled the hubbub of a tumultuous mob. My stupor was followed by a distressful agony lighted by a faint ray of hope—perhaps Ellen was not dead. I ran to the inside chamber; it was closed from within. I knocked and called Sampso at the top of my voice. She answered me from another room, in which she had been locked up. I set her free, crying aloud:

"I struck Ellen with my sword in the dark—the wound may not be mortal;—run for the druid Omer—"

"I shall run to him on the spot," answered Sampso without asking me any questions.

She rushed to the house door which was bolted from within. As she opened it I saw a mob of soldiers advancing over the square where my house was situated and which was close to the entrance of the camp. Several soldiers carried torches; all uttered loud and threatening cries in which the name of Victorin constantly recurred.

I recognized the veteran Douarnek at the head of the mob. He was brandishing his sword.

"Schanvoch," he cried the moment he recognized me, "the rumor has just run over the camp that a shocking crime was committed in your house!"

"And the criminal is Victorin!" cried several voices drowning mine. "Death to the infamous fellow!"

"Death to the infamous fellow, who violated the wife of his friend!"

"Just as he violated the wife of the tavern-keeper on the Rhine, who killed herself in despair."

"The cowardly hypocrite pretended to have mended his ways!"

"To dishonor a soldier's wife! The wife of Schanvoch, who loved the debauché as if he were his own son!"

"And who, moreover, saved his life in battle!"

"Death! Death to the wretch!"

I found it impossible to dominate the furious cries with my voice; Sampso vainly sought to cross the crowd.

"For pity's sake, let me pass!" Sampso implored them. "I wish to fetch a physician druid. Ellen still breathes; her wound may not be mortal! Let me bring her help!"

Her words only served to redouble the indignation and fury of the soldiers. Instead of opening a passage for my wife's sister, they drove her back as they crowded towards the door. A compact and enraged mass stood there brandishing their swords, shaking their fists and vociferating:

"Death! Death to Victorin!"

"He slew Schanvoch's wife after doing violence to her!"

"She has died as the tavern-keeper's wife on the Rhine!"

"Victorin!" thundered Douarnek. "You will not this time escape punishment for your crimes!"

"We shall be your executioners!"

"Death! Death to Victorin!"

"It is impossible to break through the crowd and fetch a physician for my sister—she is lost!" Sampso cried out to

me wringing her hands, while I vainly strove to make myself heard by the delirious crowd.

"I shall try to get out by the window," said Sampso.

Saying this the distracted girl rushed into the mortuary chamber, and I, making superhuman efforts to prevent the infuriated soldiers from invading my house in search of the general, for whose blood they thirsted, cried out to them:

"Withdraw! Leave me alone in this house of mourning! Justice has been done! Withdraw, comrades, withdraw!"

An ever heightening tumult drowned my words. I saw Sampso issuing from your mother's room carrying you, my son, in her arms. She was sobbing aloud and said:

"Brother, there is no hope! Ellen is rigid—her heart has stopped beating—she is dead!"

"Dead! Oh, dead! Hesus, have pity upon me!" I moaned and leaned against the wall of the vestibule; I felt my strength leaving me. Suddenly, however, a thrill ran through my frame. From mouth to mouth these words began to circulate among the soldiers:

"Here is Victoria! Here comes our mother!"

As the words were uttered the crowd swayed back from the entrance of my house to make room for my foster-sister. Such was the respect that the august woman inspired in the army, that silence speedily succeeded the tumultuous clamors of the soldiers. They realized the terrible position of that mother, who, attracted by the cries for justice and vengeance uttered against her own son, accused of an infamous crime, approached the scene in all the majesty of her maternal grief.

As to me, my heart felt like breaking. Victoria, my foster-sister, the woman in whose behalf my life had been but one continuous day of devotion—Victoria was about to find in my

house the corpse of her son, slain by me—by me who knew him since his birth, and who loved him like my own! The thought of fleeing flashed through my mind—I lacked the physical strength. I remained where I was, supporting myself against the wall—distracted—vaguely looking before me, unable to stir.

The crowd of soldiers parted; they formed a long passage; and by the light of the moon and the torches I saw Victoria, clad in her long black robe and her little grandson in her arms, advancing slowly. She doubtlessly hoped to soothe the exasperation of the soldiers by presenting the innocent creature to their sight. Tetrik, Captain Marion and several other officers, who had notified Victoria of the tumult and its cause, followed behind her. They seemed to succeed in calming the seething fury of the troops. The silence grew solemn. The Mother of the Camps was only a few steps from my house when Douarnek approached her, and bending his knee said:

"Mother, your son has committed a great crime—we pity you from the bottom of our hearts. But you will see to it that justice is rendered us—we demand justice—"

"Yes, yes, justice!" cried the soldiers, whose irritation, after being checked for a moment, now broke out with renewed violence. The cry broke forth from all parts: "Justice! Or we will do justice ourselves!"

"Death to the infamous wretch!"

"Death to the man who dishonored his friend's wife!"

"Cursed be the name of Victorin!"

"Yes, cursed—cursed!" repeated a thousand threatening voices. "Cursed be his name forever!"

Pale, calm and imposing, Victoria stopped for a moment before Douarnek, who bent his knee as he addressed her. But

when the cries of: "Death to Victorin!" "Cursed be his name!" exploded anew, my foster-sister, whose virile and beautiful countenance betrayed mortal anguish, stretched out her arms with the little child in them, as if the innocent creature implored mercy for its father.

It was then that the cries broke forth with fiercest violence:

"Death to Victorin! Cursed be his name!"

And immediately I perceived my recent traveling companion, recognizable by his cloak and hood, in which he still kept himself closely wrapped, push himself with a menacing air toward Victoria, and shaking his fist at her, cry:

"Yes, cursed be the name of Victorin! Let his stock be uprooted!"

Saying this the man violently tore the child from Victoria's arms, took it by the two feet, and dashed it with such fury upon the cobblestones that its head was instantly shattered. The deed of ferocity was done with such brutality and swiftness that, although it aroused instant indignation, neither Douarnek nor any of the soldiers who precipitated themselves upon the hooded man to save the child were in time. The innocent child lay dead and bleeding upon the ground. I heard a heartrending cry escape Victoria, but immediately lost sight of her; fearing that some sort of danger threatened her life, the soldiers speedily surrounded and built with their breasts a wall around their mother. The rumor also reached my ears that, thanks to the tumult which ensued, the perpetrator of the horrible murder had succeeded in making his escape. Presently the ranks of the soldiers opened anew amid mournful silence, and again I perceived Victoria, her face bathed in tears, holding in her arms the now lifeless and bleeding body of Victorin's son. At the sight, I cried out

from the threshold of my house to the crowd that was now dumb and in consternation:

"You demand justice? Justice has been done. I, Schanvoch, I have killed Victorin myself. He is innocent of my wife's death. Now, withdraw. Allow the Mother of the Camps to enter my house that she may weep over the bodies of her son and grandson."

Victoria thereupon said to me in a firm voice as she stood at the threshold of my house:

"You killed my son; you were right to avenge the outrage done to you."

"Yes," I answered her in a hollow voice, "yes, and in the dark I also killed my wife."

"Come, Schanvoch, join me in closing the eyelids of Ellen and Victorin."

CHAPTER III.

THE MORTUARY CHAMBER.

Victoria entered the house amidst the religious silence of the soldiers who stood grouped without. Captain Marion and Tetrik followed her in. She motioned to them to remain outside of the death room, where she wished to be left alone with me and Sampso.

At the sight of my wife, lying dead upon the floor, I fell upon my knees sobbing beside her. I raised her beautiful head, now pale and cold; closed her eyes; and taking the beloved body in my arms I laid it on my bed. Again I knelt down, and with my head resting upon the pillow on which hers reclined, I could no longer restrain my grief. I sobbed and moaned. I remained there long weeping and disconsolate; I could hear the suppressed sobs of Victoria.

Finally her voice recalled me to myself; I thought of what she must be suffering; I looked around. She was seated on the floor near the corpse of Victorin, whose head rested on her maternal knees.

"Schanvoch," said my foster-sister as she gently brushed back with her hands the hair that fell over Victorin's forehead, "my son is no more; I may weep over him, despite his crime. Here he lies dead—dead—dead and not yet twenty-three years old!"

"Dead—and killed by me—who loved him as my son!"

"Brother, you avenged your honor—you have my pardon and pity—"

"Alas! I struck Victorin in the dark—I struck him in a fit of blind rage—I struck him without knowing that it was he! Hesus is my witness! Had I recognized your son, Oh, sister! I would have cursed him, but my sword would have dropped at my feet—"

Victoria gazed at me in silence. My words seemed to lift a heavy weight from her heart. She looked relieved at learning that I had killed her son without knowing him. She reached out her hand to me feelingly, and I carried it respectfully to my lips. For several minutes we remained silent. She then said to Ellen's sister:

"Sampso, were you here this fatal night? Speak, I pray you. What happened?"

"It was midnight," Sampso answered in a voice broken with sobs. "Schanvoch had left the house two hours before on his journey. I was lying here beside my sister—I heard a rap at the house door—I threw a cloak over my shoulders and went to the door to ask who it was. A woman's voice with a foreign accent answered—"

"A woman's voice?" I asked in a tone of surprise shared by Victoria. "Are you sure it was a woman's voice that answered you, Sampso?"

"Yes; that was the snare. The voice said to me: 'I come from Victoria with a very important message for Ellen, the wife of Schanvoch, who left on a journey two hours ago.'"

At these words of Sampso's, Victoria and I exchanged looks of increasing astonishment. Sampso proceeded:

"As I could in no way suspect a messenger from Victoria, I opened the door. Immediately, instead of a woman, a man

rushed at me; he violently pushed me back—and immediately bolted the street door. By the light of the lamp, which I had placed on the floor, I recognized Victorin. He was pale—frightful to behold—he seemed to be intoxicated, and could hardly stand on his feet—"

"Oh! The unhappy boy! The unhappy boy!" I cried. "He was not in his senses! Only so! Oh, only so! He never could otherwise have attempted such a crime!"

"Proceed, Sampso," said Victoria with a profound sigh; "proceed with your account—"

"Without saying a word to me, Victorin pointed to the door of my own room, the room I always occupied when I did not share my sister's room during the absence of Schanvoch. In my terror I guessed all. I cried to Ellen: 'Sister, lock your door!' and I began to call for help as loud as I could. My cries exasperated Victorin. He seized and threw me into my room. Just as he was about to lock me in I saw Ellen hurrying out of her room. She looked pale and frightened; she was almost naked. I afterwards heard the distressing cries of my sister calling for help—I heard them struggle—I fainted away. I know not how long I remained in that state. I regained consciousness when someone knocked at my door and called me by name. It was Schanvoch. I answered him. He must have opened it for me—I saw him—"

"And you," Victoria said, turning to me. "How was it that you returned so suddenly?"

"At about four leagues from Mayence, I was notified that a crime was being committed in my house."

"And who could have notified you?"

"A soldier; my escort."

"And who was that soldier?" asked Victoria with heightening intensity. "How did he know of the crime?"

"I know not—he vanished across the forest the instant that he gave me the sinister information. That soldier got back to town before me—he was the same man who tore your grandchild from your arms and killed it at your feet—"

"Schanvoch," resumed Victoria with a shudder and carrying both her hands to her forehead, "my son is dead—I shall neither accuse nor excuse him—but a horrible mystery underlies this crime—"

"Listen," I replied, as several circumstances that had slipped my memory at the first pangs of my grief now came back to my mind. "When I arrived before the door of my house, I knocked; only the distant sound of Sampso's cries answered me. A moment later the lower window of my wife's room was opened. I ran thither. The shutters were being pushed aside to give passage to a man, while Ellen cried for help. I pushed the man back into the room, which was dark as a tomb—in the darkness I struck and killed your son. Almost immediately after I felt two arms thrown around my neck—I imagined myself attacked by a new assailant—I made another thrust in the dark—it was Ellen, my beloved wife, whom I killed—"

And my sobs choked me.

"Brother—brother," said Victoria to me, "this has been a fatal night to us all—"

"Listen further—above all to this," I said to my foster-sister, controlling my emotion: "At the very moment when I recognized the voice of my expiring wife, I saw by the light of the moon a woman perched on the casement of the window—"

"A woman!" cried Victoria.

"It is she probably whose voice deceived me," observed Sampso, "by announcing to me a message from Victoria."

"I think so too," I replied; "and that woman, doubtlessly the accomplice of Victorin's crime, called to him, saying it was time to flee, and that she now was his, seeing he had kept the promise that he made to her."

"A promise?" Again Victoria pondered. "What promise could he have made to her?"

"To dishonor Ellen—"

My foster-sister shuddered and said:

"I repeat it, Schanvoch, this crime is wrapped in some horrible mystery. But who may that woman have been?"

"One of the two Bohemian dancers who recently arrived at Mayence. Listen. Seeing that she received no answer from Victorin, and hearing the distant but approaching clamors of the soldiers who were angrily hastening to my house, she leaped down and vanished. A second after the rumbling of her cart informed me of her flight. In my despair it never occurred to me to pursue her. I knew I had just killed Ellen near the cradle of our son—Ellen, my dearly beloved wife!"

I could not continue. Tears and sobs deprived me of speech. Sampso and Victoria remained silent.

"This is a veritable abyss!" resumed the Mother of the Camps. "An abyss that my mind can not fathom. My son's crime is great—his intoxication, so far from excusing, only serves to render the deed all the more shameful. And yet, Schanvoch, you know not what love this poor child had for you—"

"Say not so, Victoria," I murmured, hiding my face in my hands. "Say not so—my despair becomes only more distressing!"

"It is not a reproach that I make, brother," replied Victoria. "Had I been a witness of my son's crime, I would have killed him with my own hands, to the end that he cease to dishonor his mother, and Gaul, that chose him chief. I refer to Victorin's love for you because I believe that, without his being in a state of inebriety and without some dark machination, he never would have committed such a misdeed—"

"As for me, sister, I believe I see through this infernal plot—"

"You do? Speak!"

"Before the great battle of the Rhine an infamous calumny was spread over the camp against Victorin. The army's affection for him was being withdrawn. Your son's victory regained for him the soldiers' affection. See how that old calumny becomes to-day a frightful reality. Victorin's crime cost him his life—and also his son's. His stock is extinct. A new chief must now be chosen for Gaul. Is this not so?"

"Yes, brother, all that is true."

"Did not that unknown soldier, my traveling companion, know when he revealed to me that a crime was being committed in my house—did he not know that unless I arrived in time to kill Victorin myself in the first access of my rage, your son would certainly be slaughtered by the troops who would undoubtedly rise in revolt at the first tidings of the felony?"

"But how," put in Sampso, "was the army apprised so soon of the felony, seeing that no one left the house?"

Struck by Sampso's observation the Mother of the Camps started and looked at me. I proceeded:

"Who is the man, Victoria, who tore your grandson from your arms and dashed his life against the ground? The same

unknown soldier! Did he yield to an impulse of blind rage against the child? Not at all! Accordingly, he was but the instrument of some ambition that is as concealed as it is ferocious. Only one man had an interest in the double murder that has just extinguished your stock—because, once your stock is extinguished Gaul must choose a new chief—and the man whom I suspect, the man whom I accuse has long wished to govern Gaul!"

"His name!" cried Victoria, fixing upon me a look of intense agony. "The name of the man whom you suspect—"

"His name is Tetrik, your relative, the Governor of Gascony."

For the first time since I first expressed my suspicions of her relative, did Victoria seem to share them. She cast her eyes upon the corpse of her son with an expression of pitiful sorrow, kissed his icy forehead several times, and after a moment of profound reflection she seemed to take a supreme resolution. She rose and said to me in a firm voice:

"Where is Tetrik?"

"He awaits your orders in the next room, I presume, with Captain Marion. What are your orders?"

"I wish them both to come in, immediately."

"In this chamber of death?"

"Yes, in this chamber of death. Yes, here, Schanvoch, before the inanimate remains of your wife, my son and his child. If it was that man who wove this dark and horrible plot, then, even if he were a demon of hypocrisy and bloodthirstiness, he can not choose but betray himself at the sight of his victims—at the sight of a mother between the corpses of her son and grandson; at the sight of a husband beside the corpse of his wife. Go, brother. Order them in! Order

them in! Then also, we must at all cost find that unknown soldier, your traveling companion!"

"I have thought of that—" and struck with a sudden thought, I added: "It was Captain Marion who chose the rider that was to escort me."

"We shall question the captain. Go, brother. Order them in! Order them in!"

I obeyed Victoria and called in Tetrik and Marion. Both hastened to answer to the summons.

Despite the grief that rent my heart I had the fortitude to watch attentively the face of the Governor of Gascony. The moment he stepped into the room, the first object he seemed to notice was the corpse of Victorin. Tetrik's features immediately assumed the appearance of unspeakable anguish; tears flowed copiously down his cheeks; clasping his hands he dropped on his knees near the body and cried in a voice that seemed rent with grief:

"Dead at the prime of his age—dead—he, so brave—so generous! The hope, the strong sword of Gaul. Ah! I forget the foibles of this unhappy youth before the frightful misfortune that has befallen my country!"

Tetrik could not proceed. Sobs smothered his voice. On his knees and cowering in a heap, his face hidden in his hands and dropping scalding tears he remained as if crushed with pain near Victorin's body.

Standing motionless at the door, Captain Marion was the prey of profound internal sorrow. He indulged in no outbursts of moans; he shed no tears; but he ceased not to contemplate the corpse of Victoria's grandson with a pathetic expression, as the little body lay in my son's cradle; and

presently I heard him say in a low voice looking from Victoria to the innocent victim:

"What a calamity! Ah! poor child! Poor mother!"

Captain Marion then took a few steps forward and said in short and broken words:

"Victoria—you are to be pitied—I pity you. Victorin loved you—he was a worthy son—I also loved him. My beard has turned grey, and yet I found a delight in serving under that young man. He was the first captain of our age. None of us can replace him. He had but two vices—the taste for wine and, above all, the pest of profligacy. I often quarreled with him on that. I was right, you see it! Well, we must not quarrel with him now. He had a brave heart. I can say no more to you, Victoria. And what would it boot? A mother can not be consoled. Do not think me unfeeling because I do not weep. One weeps only when he can; but I assure you that you have my sympathy from the bottom of my heart. I could not be sadder or more cast down had I lost my friend Eustace—"

And taking a few steps, Marion again looked from Victoria to her little grandson, repeating as his eyes wandered from the one to the other:

"Oh! the poor child! Oh! the poor mother!"

Still upon his knees beside Victorin, Tetrik did not cease sobbing and moaning. While his grief was as demonstrative as Captain Marion's was reserved, it seemed sincere. Nevertheless, my suspicions still resisted the test, and I saw that my foster-sister shared my doubts. Again she made a violent effort over herself and said:

"Tetrik, listen to me!"

The Governor of Gascony did not seem to hear the voice of his relative.

"Tetrik," Victoria repeated, leaning over to touch the man's shoulder, "I am speaking to you; answer me."

"Who speaks?" cried the governor as if his mind wandered. "What do they want? Where am I?"

A moment later he raised his eyes to my foster-sister and cried surprised:

"You here—here, Victoria? Oh, yes! I was with you shortly ago—I had forgotten. Excuse me. My head swims. Alas! I am a father—I have a son almost of the age of this unfortunate boy. More than anyone else, I pity you!"

"Time presses and the occasion is grave," replied my foster-sister solemnly while she fastened a penetrating look upon Tetrik in order to fathom the man's most hidden thoughts. "Private sorrow is hushed before the public interest. I have my whole life left to weep my son and grandson; but we have only a few hours to consider the succession of the Chief of Gaul and of the general of the army—"

"What!" exclaimed Tetrik. "At such a moment as this—"

"I wish that before daylight breaks upon us, I, Captain Marion and you, Tetrik, my relative, one of my most faithful friends, you, who are so devoted to Gaul, you, who grieve so bitterly over Victorin—I wish that we three revolve in our wisdom what man we shall to-morrow propose to the army as my son's successor."

"Victoria, you are a heroic woman!" cried Tetrik clasping his hands in admiration. "You match with your courage and patriotism the most august women who have honored the world!"

"What is your opinion, Tetrik, as to the successor of Vic-

torin? Captain Marion and myself will speak after you," the Mother of the Camps proceeded to say without noticing the praises of the Governor of Gascony. "Yes, whom do you think capable of replacing my son—to the glory and advantage of Gaul?"

"How can I give you my opinion?" Tetrik replied dejectedly. "How can I give you advice upon a matter of such gravity, when my heart is racked with pain—it is impossible!"

"It is possible, since you see me here—between the corpses of my son and my grandson—ready to give my opinion—"

"If you insist, Victoria, I shall speak, provided I can collect my thoughts. I am of the opinion that Gaul needs for her chief a wise, firm and enlightened man, a man who inclines to peace rather than to war—especially now when we no longer have the neighborhood of the Franks to fear, thanks to the sword of this young hero, whom I loved and will eternally mourn—"

At this moment the governor interrupted himself to give renewed vent to his grief.

"We shall weep later," said Victoria. "Life is long enough, but the night is short. It will soon be morning."

Tetrik wiped his eyes and proceeded:

"As I was saying, the successor of our Victorin should, above all, be a man of good judgment, and of long and approved devotion in the service of our beloved Gaul. Now, then, if I am not mistaken, the only one whom I can think of who unites these virtues, is Captain Marion, whom we see here."

"I!" cried the captain raising his two enormous hands heavenward. "I, the Chief of Gaul! Grief makes you talk like a fool! I, Chief of Gaul!"

"Captain Marion," Tetrik resumed in a dismal accent, "I know that the shocking death of Victorin and his innocent child has thrown my mind into disorder and desolation. And yet I believe that at this moment I speak not like a fool but like a sage—and Victoria will herself be of my opinion. Although you do not enjoy the brilliant military reputation of our Victorin, whom we shall never be able to mourn sufficiently, you have deserved, Captain Marion, the confidence and affection of our troops by your good and numerous services. Once a blacksmith, you exchanged the hammer for the sword; the soldiers will see in you one of their own rank rise to the dignity of chief through his valor and their own free choice. They will esteem you all the more knowing, above all, that, although you reached distinction, you never lost your friendship for your old comrade of the anvil."

"Forget my friend Eustace!" said Marion. "Oh! Never!"

"The austerity of your morals is known," Tetrik proceeded to say; "your excellent judgment, your straightforwardness, your calmness, are, according to my poor judgment, a guarantee for the future. You have put into practice Victoria's wise thought that now the days of barren war are ended, and the hour has come to think of fruitful peace. The task is arduous, I admit; it can not choose but startle your modesty. But this heroic woman, who, even at this terrible moment, forgets her maternal despair in order to turn her thoughts upon our beloved country, Victoria, I feel certain, in presenting you to the soldiers as her son's successor, will pledge herself to assist you with her precious counsel. And now, Captain Marion, if you will hearken to my feeble voice, I implore you, I beg you in the name of Gaul to accept the reins of office. Victoria joins me in demanding of you this

fresh proof of self-sacrificing devotion to our common country!"

"Tetrik," answered Marion in a grave voice, "you have ably described the man who is needed to govern Gaul. There is only one thing to change in the picture that you have drawn, and that is its name. In the place of my name, insert your own—it will then be complete—"

"I!" cried Tetrik. "I, Chief of Gaul! I, who in all my life never have held a sword in my hand!"

"Victoria said it," replied Marion. "The season for war is over, the season for peace has come. In times of war we need warriors—in times of peace we need men of peace. You belong to the latter category, Tetrik; it is your place to govern—do you not think so, Victoria?"

"By the manner in which he has governed Gascony, Tetrik has shown how he would govern Gaul," answered my foster-sister; "I join you, captain, in requesting—my relative—to replace my son—"

"What did I tell you?" broke in Captain Marion addressing Tetrik. "Would you still refuse?"

"Listen to me, Victoria; listen to me, Captain Marion; listen to me, Schanvoch," replied the governor turning towards me. "Yes, you also, Schanvoch, listen to me, you who are as stricken as Victoria. You, who, in your nervous friendship for this august woman, suspected my sincerity; I wish you all to believe me. I have received an incurable wound here, in my heart, by the occurrences of this fatal night; they have bereft us at once, in the person of our unfortunate Victorin and in that of his innocent son, of the present and the future support of Gaul. It was for the purpose of securing and rendering the future certain that I sought to in-

duce Victoria to propose her grandson to the army as the heir of Victorin, and that I have made this journey to Mayence. My hopes are dashed—an eternal sorrow takes their place—"

After stopping for a moment in order to allow his inexhaustible tears to flow, the governor proceeded:

"My resolution is formed. Not only do I decline the power that is offered me, but I shall also give up the government of Gascony. The few years of life left to me shall henceforth be spent with my son in seclusion and sorrow. At another time I might have been able to render some service to our country, but that is now past with me. I shall carry into my retirement a grief that will be rendered less unbearable by the knowledge that my country's future is in such worthy hands as yours, Captain Marion, and that Victoria, the divine genius of Gaul, will continue to watch over our land. And now, Schanvoch," added the Governor of Gascony turning once more towards me, "have I put an end to your suspicions? Do you still think me ambitious? Is my language, are my actions those of a perfidious or treacherous man? Alas! Alas! I never thought that the frightful misfortunes of this night would so soon afford me the opportunity to justify myself—"

"Tetrik," said Victoria extending her hand to her relative, "if ever I could have doubted the loyalty of your heart, I would at this hour perceive my error—"

"And I admit it freely, my suspicions were groundless," I added in turn. After all that I had seen and heard, I was, as Victoria, convinced of her relative's innocence. And still, as my mind ever returned to the mysterious circumstances that surrounded the events of that night, I said to Marion,

who, silent and pensive, seemed overwhelmed with the tender that was made to him:

"Captain, yesterday I asked you for a discreet and safe man to serve me as escort."

"You did."

"Do you know the name of the soldier whom you picked out for me?"

"It was not I who chose him—I do not know his name."

"And who chose him?" asked Victoria.

"My friend Eustace is better acquainted with the soldiers than I am. I commissioned him to find me a safe man, and to order him to repair after dark to the town gate, where he was to wait for the rider whom he was to accompany on the journey."

"And after that," I asked the captain, "did you see your friend Eustace again?"

"No; he has been mounting guard at the outposts of the camp since last evening, and he was not to be relieved until this morning."

"But at any rate we could learn from him the name of the rider who escorted Schanvoch," observed Victoria. "I shall let you know later, Tetrik, the importance that I attach to that information, and you will be able to counsel me."

"You must excuse me, Victoria, if I do not acceed to your wishes," the governor replied with a sigh. "Within an hour, at earliest dawn, I shall leave Mayence—the sight of this place is too harrowing to me. I have a humble retreat in Gascony; I shall bury my life there in the company of my son; he is to-day the only consolation left to me."

"My friend," said Victoria reproachfully, "do you leave me at such a moment as this? The sight of this place is har-

rowing to you, you say—and what about myself? Does not this place recall at every turn memories that must distress me? And yet I shall leave Mayence only when Captain Marion will no longer stand in need of whatever counsel he may think that he may be in need of from me at the start of his government."

"Victoria," put in Captain Marion in a resolute tone, "I have said nothing during this conversation in which you and Tetrik have disposed of me. I am not fluent in words, moreover, my heart is too heavy to-night. I have said little, but I have reflected a good deal. These are my thoughts: I love the profession of arms; I know how to execute a general's orders, and I am not altogether unskilful in the management of troops confided to me. At a pinch I can plan an attack like the one which completed Victorin's great victory by the destruction of the camp and reserve forces of the Franks. This is to say, Victoria, that I do not consider myself more of a fool than others—wherefore I have sense enough to understand that I am not fit for the government of Gaul—"

"Nevertheless, Captain Marion," Tetrik broke in, "Victoria will agree with me that the task is not beyond your strength."

"Oh! As to my strength, that is well known," replied Captain Marion soberly. "Fetch me an ox, and I'll carry him on my back, or fell him with a blow of my fist. But square shoulders are not all that is wanted for the chief of a great people. No—no. I am robust—granted. But the burden of state is too heavy. Therefore, Victoria, do not put such a weight upon me. I would break down under it—and Gaul will, in turn, break down under the weight of my weakness. And, moreover, it might as well be said, I love, after service

hours, to go home and empty a pot of beer in the company of my friend Eustace, and chat with him over our old blacksmith's trade, or entertain ourselves with furbishing our arms like skilful armorers. Such am I, Victoria—such have I ever been—and such I wish to remain."

"And these call themselves men! Oh, Hesus!" cried the Mother of the Camps indignantly. "I, a woman—I, a mother—I saw my son and grandson die this very night—and yet I have the necessary fortitude to repress my grief—and this soldier, to whom the most glorious post that can shed luster upon a man is offered, dares to answer with a refusal, giving his love for beer and the polishing of armor as an excuse! Oh! Woe is Gaul, if the very ones whom she regards as her bravest sons thus cowardly forsake her!"

The reproach of the Mother of the Camps impressed Captain Marion. He dropped his head in confusion, remained silent for a moment, and then spoke:

"Victoria, there is but one strong soul here—it is yours. You make me ashamed of myself. Well, then," he added with a sigh, "be it as you will—I accept. But the gods are my witnesses—I accept as a duty and under protest. If I should commit any asininities as Chief of Gaul, none will have a right to reproach me. Very well, I accept, Victoria, but under two imperative conditions."

"What are they?" asked Tetrik.

"This is the first," replied Marion: "The Mother of the Camps shall remain in Mayence to help me with her advice. I am as new a hand at my new work as a blacksmith's apprentice who for the first time dips the iron into the brasier."

"I promised you that I would, Marion," answered my fos-

ter-sister. "I shall remain here as long as you may need my services."

"Victoria, if your spirit should withdraw from me, I would be like a body without a soul—accordingly, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. I know that that promise must cost you a good deal, poor woman. And yet," added the captain with his habitual good nature, "do not run away with the idea that I am so foolishly vainglorious as to imagine that it is to the strong bull of a warrior, named Marion, that Victoria the Great makes the sacrifice of burying her grief in order to guide him. No—no. It is to our old Gaul that she renders the sacrifice. As a good son of my country, I am as thankful for the kind act done to my mother, as if it were done to myself."

"Nobly thought and nobly said, Marion," replied Victoria deeply touched by these words of the captain. "Nevertheless, your straightforwardness and sound judgment will soon enable you to dispense with my advice; then," added she with an expression of profound pain that she strove to repress, "I shall be able, like you, Tetrik, to retire and bury myself in some secluded spot with my sorrows."

"Alas," replied the governor, "to weep in peace is the only consolation for irreparable losses. "But," he proceeded, addressing the captain, "you referred to two conditions. Victoria has accepted the first; which is the second?"

"Oh! As to the second, it is as important to me as the first," and the captain shook his head. "Aye, it is as important as the first—"

"And what is it?" asked my foster-sister. "Explain yourself, Marion."

"I know not," replied the good captain with a naïve and

embarrassed mien, "I know not whether I ever spoke to you of my friend Eustace."

"Yes, and more than once," replied Tetrik. "But what has your friend Eustace to do with your new functions?"

"What!" cried Captain Marion, "you ask me what my friend Eustace has to do with me—you might as well ask what has the sheath of the sword to do with the blade, the hammer with the handle, the bellows with the forge."

"You are, in short, bound together by an old and close friendship; we know it," said Victoria. "Would you desire, captain, to accord some favor to your friend?"

"I shall never consent to be separated from him. True enough, he is not of a gay disposition; he is habitually sullen, often peevish. Still, he loves me as I do him, and we can not do without each other. Now, then, it may be considered surprising that the Chief of Gaul should have a common soldier, a former blacksmith, for his intimate friend and chum. But as I said to you, Victoria, if I must be separated from my friend Eustace, the plan falls through—I decline. Only his friendship can render the burden supportable to me."

"Is not Schanvoch, my foster-brother, who remained a simple horseman in the army, a close friend of mine?" observed Victoria. "No one is astonished at a friendship that does honor to us both. It will be so, Captain Marion, with you and your old blacksmith friend."

"And your elevation, Captain Marion, will redouble your mutual affection," put in Tetrik. "In his tender affection your friend will rejoice over your elevation perhaps more than yourself."

"I doubt whether my friend Eustace will greatly rejoice over my elevation," replied Marion. "Eustace is not ambi-

tious after glory. Far from it. He loves me, his old companion at the anvil, and not the captain. But, Victoria, always keep this in mind: The same as to-day you say to me: 'Marion, you are needed,' never be backward in saying: 'Marion, be gone; you are of no further use; someone else will fill the place better than you.' I shall understand the slightest hint, and shall gladly return arm in arm with my friend Eustace to our pot of beer and our armor. So long, however, as you will say to me: 'Marion, you are needed,' I shall remain Chief of Gaul"—and smothering a last sigh, "seeing that you insist that I fill the place."

"And chief you will long remain to the glory of Gaul," put in Tetrik. "Believe me, captain, you do not know yourself; your modesty blinds you. But a few hours hence, when Victoria will propose you to the soldiers as their general, the acclamation of the whole army will inform you of the high opinion that is entertained for your merits."

"The one who will be most astonished at my merits will be myself," replied the good captain naïvely. "Well, I have made the promise; it is promised; count with me, Victoria, you have my word. I shall withdraw—I shall go to my lodging and wait for my good friend Eustace. It is now dawn; he is due from the advanced posts, where he has been on guard since yesterday. He will be uneasy if he does not find me in."

"Forget not, captain," I said to him, "to ask your friend for the name of the soldier whom he chose to escort me."

"I shall remember."

"And now, adieu," said the Governor of Gascony with a smothered voice to Victoria. "Adieu; the sun will soon be up. Every minute that I spend here is torture to me—"

"Would you not stay in Mayence at least until the ashes of my two children are returned to the earth?" Victoria asked the governor. "Will you not accord that religious homage to the memory of those who have just preceded us to those unknown worlds, where we shall one day meet them again? Oh! May it please Hesus that that day be soon!"

"Oh! Our druid faith will always be the consolation of strong souls and the support of the weak!" answered Tetrik. "Alas! But for the certainty of meeting again the beings whom we have loved in this world, how much more dreadful would not their departure in death be to us! Believe me, Victoria, I shall see long before you, these dear beings whom to-day we weep. Agreeable to your wishes, I shall render to them to-day, before my departure, the last homage that is due to them."

Tetrik and Captain Marion withdrew, leaving Victoria, Sampso and myself alone.

CHAPTER IV.

FUNERAL PYRES.

Left all alone to ourselves, we no longer repressed our tears. In silent and pious meditation we clad Ellen in her wedding gown, while you, my child, still slept peacefully.

In order to attend to the supreme interests of Gaul, Victoria had heroically curbed her grief. After the departure of Tetrik and Marion she gave way to the overpowering sorrow that heaved her bosom. She wished to wash the wounds of her son and grandson with her own hands; with her maternal hands she wrapped them in the same winding cloth. Two funeral pyres were raised on the border of the Rhine, one destined for Victorin and his son, the other for my wife Ellen.

Towards noon, two war chariots covered with green and accompanied by several of our venerated female druids proceeded to my house. The body of my wife Ellen was deposited on one of the two chariots, on the other the remains of Victorin and his son.

"Schanvoch," said Victoria to me, "I shall follow on foot the chariot on which your beloved wife lies. Be merciful, brother, follow on foot the chariot on which lie the remains of my son and grandson. Before the eyes of all, you, the outraged husband, will thus be giving a token of pardon to the memory of Victorin. And I also, will, before the eyes

of all, give token, as a mother, of pardon for the death that, alas! my son but too fully merited!"

I understood the touching appeal that lay in that thought of mutual mercy and pardon. It was so done. A deputation of the cohorts and legions preceded the funeral procession. I followed the hearses accompanied by Victoria, Sampso, Tetrik and Marion. The chief officers of the camp joined us. We marched amidst lugubrious silence. The first outburst of rage against Victorin having spent itself, the army now only remembered his bravery, his kindness, his openheartedness. The crowds saw me, the victim of an outrage that cost Ellen's life, give public token of pardon to Victorin by my following the hearse that carried his remains; they also saw his mother following the hearse on which Ellen reposed, and none had any but words of forgiveness and pity for the memory of the young general.

The funeral convoy was approaching the river bank where the two pyres were raised, when Douarnek, who marched at the head of one of the deputations of cohorts, profited by a halt in the procession to approach me. He said with pronounced sadness:

"Schanvoch, you have my sympathy. Assure Victoria, your sister, that we, the soldiers, remember only the valor of her glorious son. He has so long been our beloved son as well. Why did he disregard the frank and wise words that I carried to him in the name of our whole army, on the evening after our great battle of the Rhine! Had Victorin taken our advice and mended his ways, had he reformed, none of these misfortunes would have happened—"

"Your words, comrade, will be a consolation to Victoria in her grief," I answered Douarnek. "But do you know what-

ever became of the hooded soldier who committed the barbarity of killing Victorin's child?"

"Neither I, nor any of those near me at the time when the abominable crime was committed, was able to catch the felon. He slipped from us in the tumult and darkness. He fled towards the outposts of the camp, but there, thanks to the gods, he met with condign punishment."

"He is dead?"

"Perhaps you know Eustace, the old blacksmith and friend of our brave Captain Marion? He was mounting guard last night at the outposts. It seems that Eustace has a sweetheart in town. Excuse me, Schanvoch, if I mention to you such matters on so sad an occasion, but you asked me, and I am answering—"

"Proceed, friend Douarnek."

"Well, instead of remaining at his post, and despite the watchword, Eustace spent a part of the night in Mayence. He was returning at about an hour before dawn, hoping, as he said to me, that his absence would have passed unnoticed, when he saw a hooded man running breathlessly near the posts on the river bank. 'Whither are you running so fast?' he cried out. 'Those brutes are pursuing me!' was the answer, 'because I broke the head of Victoria's grandson by dashing it against the cobble-stones; they want to kill me.' 'And they are right! You deserve death!' replied Eustace indignantly. Saying this he overtook the infamous murderer and ran his sword through him. The corpse was found this morning on the beach with his cloak and hood."

The soldier's death destroyed my last hope of unraveling the mystery that hung over that fatal night.

The remains of Ellen, Victorin and his son were placed

upon the pyres, amidst the chants of the bards and druids. A sheet of flame rose skyward. When the chants ceased only two heaps of ashes remained.

The ashes of the pyre of Victorin and his son were piously gathered by Victoria into a bronze urn, that she placed under a mural tablet bearing the simple and touching inscription:

HERE REST THE TWO VICTORINS.

That same evening the two Bohemian girls left Mayence. Tetrik also took his departure after having exchanged the most touching adieus with Victoria. Captain Marion was presented to the troops by the Mother of the Camps and was acclaimed Chief of Gaul and general of the army. The choice evoked no surprise; moreover, being presented by Victoria, whose influence had in a manner increased with the death of her son and grandson, there was no question of his being accepted. The bravery, the good judgment, the wisdom of Captain Marion were long known and appreciated by the soldiers. After his acclamation, the new general pronounced the following words, which I later found reproduced by a contemporary historian:

"Comrades, I know that the trade of my youth may be objected to in me. Let him blame me who wills. Yes, people may twit me all they please with having been a blacksmith, provided the enemy admits that I have forged their ruin. But, as to you, my good comrades, never forget that the chief whom you have just chosen never knew and never will know how to hold anything but the sword."

CHAPTER V.

ASSASSINATION OF MARION.

Endowed with rare sagacity, a straightforward and firm nature, and ever solicitous of the advice of Victoria, Marion's government was marked with wisdom. The army grew ever more attached to him, and gave him signal proof of its loyalty and admiration up to the day, exactly two months after his acclamation, when he, in turn, fell the victim of another horrible crime. I must narrate to you, my son, the circumstances of this second crime. It is intimately connected, as you will discover, with the bloody plot that drew in its vortex all whom I loved and venerated, leaving you motherless, me a widower, and Victoria desolate.

Two months had elapsed since the fatal night when my wife Ellen, Victorin and his son lost their lives. The sight of my house became insupportable to me; too many were the cruel recollections that clustered around it. Victoria induced me to move to her house with Sampso, who took your mother's place with you.

"Here I am, all alone in the world, separated from my son and grandson to the end of my days," said my foster-sister to me. "You know, Schanvoch, all the affection of my life was centered upon those two beings, so dear to my heart. Do not leave me alone. Come, you, your son and Sampso, come

and stay with me. You will aid me thereby to bear the burden of my grief."

At first I hesitated to accept Victoria's offer. Due to a shocking fatality, I was the slayer of her son. True enough, she knew that, despite the enormity of Victorin's outrage, I would have spared his life, had I recognized him. She was aware of and saw the grief that the involuntary and yet legitimate homicide caused me. Nevertheless, and horrid was the recollection thereof to her, I had killed her son. I feared—despite all her protestations, and despite her warmly expressed desire that I move to her house—that my presence, however much wished for during the first loneliness of her bereavement, might become cruel and burdensome to her. Finally I yielded. Often did Sampso, in later years, say to me:

"Alas, Schanvoch, it was only after I saw how tenderly you always spoke of Victorin to his mother, who, in turn, spoke to you of my poor sister Ellen in the touching terms that she did, that I, together with all those who knew us, understood and admired what at first seemed impossible—the intimacy of you and Victoria, the two survivors of those victims of a cruel fatality!"

Whenever Victoria sufficiently surmounted her grief to consider the interests of the country, she applauded herself on having succeeded in deciding Captain Marion to accept the eminent post of which he daily proved himself more worthy. She wrote several times to Tetrik in that sense. He had left the government of Gascony in order to retire with his son, then about twenty years of age, to a house that he

owned near Bordeaux, and where, as he said, he sought in poetry whatever solace he could find for the death of Victorin and his son. He composed several odes on those cruel events. Nothing, indeed, could be more touching than an ode written by Tetrik on the subject of "The Two Victorins," and sent by him to Victoria. Accordingly, the letters that he addressed to her during the two months of Marion's administration were marked with profound sadness. They expressed in a manner at once so simple, so delicate and so tender the affection he entertained for her family, and the sorrow that her bereavement caused him, that my foster-sister's attachment for her relative increased by the day. Even I shared the blind confidence that she reposed in him, and forgot the suspicions that were twice awakened in my mind against the man. Moreover, my suspicions vanished before the answer made to me by Eustace, when I questioned him regarding the soldier, my mysterious traveling companion and perpetrator of the assassination of Victoria's grandson.

"Commissioned by Captain Marion to provide him with a reliable man for your escort," Eustace answered me, "I picked out a horseman named Bertal. He was ordered to wait for you at the city gate. After nightfall I left the advanced post of the camp contrary to orders and went secretly into the city. I was on my way thither when I met the soldier on horseback. He was riding along the bank of the river, and was on the way to meet you. I told him to say nothing of having met me, should he run across any of our comrades on the road. He promised secrecy, and I went my way. Early the next morning, as I was returning along the river bank from Mayence, where I spent part of the night, I saw Bertal running towards me. He was on foot; he was fleeing dis-

tractedly before the just rage of our comrades. When I learned from his own mouth the horrible crime that he even dared to glory in, I killed him on the spot. That is all I know of the wretch."

So far from the information clearing up, it obscured still more the mystery that brooded over that fatal night. The Bohemian girls had disappeared; and all inquiries set on foot regarding Bertal, my traveling companion and subsequent perpetrator of such a horrible deed as the murder of a child, agreed in representing the man as a brave and honest soldier, incapable of the monstrous deed imputed to him, and explainable only on the theory of drunkenness or insane fury.

Accordingly, my son, Marion governed Gaul for two months to the satisfaction of all. One evening, shortly before sunset, seeking some diversion from the grief that oppressed me, I took a walk into the woods near Mayence. I had been walking ahead mechanically a long time, seeking only silence and seclusion and thus penetrating deeper and deeper into the wood, when my feet struck an object that I had not noticed. I tripped and was thus drawn from my sad revery. At my feet lay a casque the visor and gorget of which were turned up. I recognized on the spot Marion's casque by those features peculiar to the casque that he wore. I examined the ground more attentively by the last rays of the sun which penetrated the foliage with difficulty. I detected traces of blood on the grass; I followed them; they led to a thicket; I entered it.

There, stretched upon some tree branches that were bent and broken with his fall, I saw Marion, bareheaded and bathed in his own blood. I thought he was dead, or at least unconscious. I was mistaken. As I stooped to raise him and

to give him some aid, my eyes caught his; they were fixed but still clear, despite approaching dissolution.

"Go away, Schanvoch!" Marion said in a voice that though fainting indicated anger. "I dragged myself to this spot in order to die in peace—I threw myself into this thicket to escape detection. Go away, Schanvoch! Leave me alone!"

"Leave you!" I cried, looking at him in stupor and observing that his blouse was red with blood just above the heart. "Leave you when your blood is flowing over your clothes, and when your wound is perhaps mortal!"

"Oh, perhaps!" replied Marion with a sarcastic smile. "It is certainly mortal, thanks to the gods!"

"I shall run to town!" I cried without stopping to consider the distance that I had just walked, absorbed as I was in my own sorrow. "I shall go for help!"

"Ha! Ha! Ha!—to run to the city—and we are two leagues away!" replied Marion with a lugubrious peal of laughter. "I am not afraid of any help that you may bring, Schanvoch. I shall be dead in less than a quarter of an hour. But, in the name of heaven, go away!"

"Are you resolved to die—did you smite yourself with your sword?"

"You have said it."

"No! You are trying to deceive me. Your sword is in its sheath."

"What is that to you? Go away—"

"You were struck by an assassin!" I exclaimed as I ran forward and picked up a sword still bloody, that my eyes just fell upon and that lay at a little distance. "This is the weapon that was used."

"I fought in loyal combat—leave me—Schanvoch—"

"You did not fight, and you did not wound yourself. Your sword lies beside you in its sheath. No, no! You fell under the blows of some cowardly assassin. Marion, let me examine your wound. Every soldier is something of a surgeon—if the flow of blood is staunched it may be enough to save your life—"

"Stop the flow of blood!" cried Marion casting at me an angry look. "Just you try to stop the flow of the blood from my wound, and you will see how I will receive you—"

"I shall endeavor to save you," I answered, "despite yourself."

As I spoke I approached Marion who lay flat upon his back. Just as I stooped over him he bent both his knees over his stomach and immediately struck out violently with his feet. The kick took me in the chest and threw me over upon the grass—so powerful was the expiring Hercules.

"Will you still bring me help despite myself?" asked Marion as I rose up, not angry but desolate over his brutality. If I should be overcome in this sad struggle, it was clear that I would be compelled to give up the hope of bringing help to the wounded man.

"Very well! Die!" I said to him, "since such is your wish. Die, since you forget that Gaul needs your services. But be sure of one thing—your death will be avenged—we shall discover the name of your assassin—"

"There has been no assassin—I gave myself the wound—"

"This sword belongs to someone," I said picking up the weapon. As I examined it I thought I could see through the blood that covered it that its blade bore an inscription. To ascertain the fact, I wiped it with some leaves. While I was engaged at this Marion cried in agony:

"Will you leave that sword alone! Quit rubbing upon the blade! Oh! My strength fails me, or I would rise and snatch the weapon from your hands. A curse upon you, who have come to disturb my last moments! Oh! It must be the devil who sent you!"

"It is the gods who sent me!" I cried struck almost dumb with horror. "It is Hesus who sent me for the punishment of the most horrible of crimes! A friend slay his friend!"

"You lie! You lie!"

"It is Eustace who dealt you the wound!"

"You lie! Oh! Why am I sinking so fast—I would smother those words in your cursed throat!"

"You were struck by this sword, the gift of your friendship to an infamous murderer—"

"It is false!"

"'*Marion forged this sword for his dear friend Eustace*'—that is the sentence engraved upon this blade," I replied to him pointing with my finger at the inscription graven in the steel. "This is the sword that you forged yourself."

"The inscription proves nothing," observed Marion in great anguish. "The man who struck me stole the sword from my friend Eustace—that's all."

"You still seek to screen that man! Oh! There will be no punishment too severe for the cowardly murderer!"

"Listen, Schanvoch," replied Marion in a sinking and suppliant voice: "I am about to die—nothing is denied to an expiring man—"

"Oh! Speak! Speak, good and brave soldier. Seeing that, to the misfortune of Gaul, fatality prevents me from saving you, speak! I shall execute your last will—"

"Schanvoch, the oath that soldiers give each other at the moment of death—is sacred, is it not?"

"Yes, my brave Marion."

"Swear to me—that you will reveal to no one that you found here the sword of my friend Eustace."

"You, his victim—and you wish to save him!"

"Promise me, Schanvoch, that you will do as I ask you—"

"Save the monster from condign punishment! Never! No, a thousand times no!"

"Schanvoch, I implore you—"

"Your murder shall be avenged—"

"Be, then, yourself accursed! You who say 'No!' to the prayer of an expiring man—to the prayer of an old soldier—who weeps—you see it. Is it agony?—is it weakness?—I know not, but I weep—"

And large drops of tears rolled down his face that gradually grew more livid.

"Good Marion, your kindheartedness distresses me! You, imploring mercy for your murderer!"

"Who else would take an interest in the unhappy fellow—if I did not?" he answered with an expression of ineffable mercifulness.

"Oh! Marion, those words are worthy of the young man of Nazareth, whom my ancestress Genevieve saw put to death in Jerusalem!"

"Friend Schanvoch—mercy—you will say nothing—I rely upon your promise—"

"No! No! Your celestial mercifulness only renders the crime more atrocious. No pity for the monster who slew his friend!"

"Go away from me!" feebly murmured Marion, sobbing.

"It is you who harrow my last moments! Eustace only slew my body—but you, pitiless before my agony, you torture my very soul!"

"Your despair distresses me—and yet listen, Marion. It is not merely the friend, the old friend that the assassin struck at—"

"For twenty-three years we never left each other's side, Eustace and I," Marion mumbled moaning.

"No, it is not the friend only that the monster struck in striking you, it was also, and perhaps especially, the Chief of Gaul and general of the army that he aimed at. The mysterious cause of this crime may be of deep interest to the country's future. The mystery must be fathomed, uncovered—"

"Schanvoch, you do not know Eustace. He cared little, I know, whether or not I was Chief of Gaul or general of the army. Moreover, what does that concern me—now, when I am about to live in yonder new worlds? All I ask of you is that you grant me this last request—do not denounce my friend Eustace. I implore you with clasped hands—"

"Granted! I shall keep the secret, but under one condition, that you inform me how the crime was committed."

"How can you have the heart to drive such a bargain—the peace of mind—a dying man—"

"The welfare of Gaul may be at stake, I tell you! Everything points to an infernal plot in this dark affair, the first victims of which were Victorin and his son. That is why I insist upon learning from you the details of this atrocious murder."

"Schanvoch—a minute ago I could still distinguish your

face—the color of your clothes—now I see before me only a vague shape. Make haste, make haste!"

"Answer—how was the crime committed? By Hesus, tell me, and I swear to you I shall keep the secret—not otherwise."

"Schanvoch—my good friend—"

"Was Eustace acquainted with Tetrik?"

"Eustace never as much as spoke to him—"

"Are you certain?"

"Eustace told me so—he ever felt—without knowing why—an aversion for the governor—I was not surprised at that. Eustace loved only me—"

"And he killed you! Speak, and I swear to you, by Hesus, that I shall keep the secret—otherwise, not!"

"I shall speak—but your silence on the matter will not suffice me. A score of times I proposed to my friend Eustace to share my purse—he met my tender with insults. Oh! his is not a venal soul—not his—he has no money—he must surely be without any resources whatever—how will he be able to flee?"

"I shall help him to flee—I shall furnish him the money that he may need—I shall be only too glad to rid the camp of such a monster with all possible speed!"

"A monster!" murmured Marion reproachfully. "You are very severe towards Eustace."

"How did he manage to inflict a mortal wound upon you, and what was his reason? Answer my question."

"Since I was acclaimed Chief of Gaul and general, my friend Eustace became more peevish than ever before, and more sullen—than he usually was—he feared, poor soul, that my elevation would make me proud—"

Marion choked in his speech. Throwing his arms about at random, he called out:

"Schanvoch, where are you?"

"Here I am, close to you—"

"I see you no longer," he said in a sinking voice. "Lean my back against a tree—I am—smothering—"

With no little difficulty I did what Marion desired; his Herculean body was heavy. Finally, however, I succeeded in drawing him up with his back against the nearest tree. Reclined against it, Marion continued in a voice that steadily grew feebler:

"In the measure that—the ill temper of my friend Eustace increased—I sought to show myself even more friendly than usual towards him. I could understand his apprehensions. Already, when I was only a captain, he could not bring himself to treat me as his former companion at the anvil. When I became general and Chief of Gaul he took me for a potentate. As to myself, certain that I esteemed him none the less—I always laughed in his face at his rudeness—I laughed—I did wrong—the poor fellow was suffering. To make it short—to-day he said to me: 'Marion, it is a long time since we took a walk together, shall we take a stroll in the woods, near the city?' I had a conference with Victoria. But fearing to displease my friend Eustace, I wrote to the Mother of the Camps, excusing myself—and he and I started on our walk arm in arm. I was reminded of the days of our apprenticeship in the forest of Chartres—where we used to go to trap magpies. I felt buoyant—and despite my grey beard —knowing that nobody saw us—I indulged in all manner of boyish tricks in order to amuse Eustace. I mimicked, as in the days of our boyhood, the cry of—the magpies—by blow-

ing upon a leaf held close to my lips. I did other monkey tricks of the same nature—It was singular—I never felt in better spirits than to-day—Eustace, on the contrary did not move—a muscle of his face—not—a smile could be extracted from him. We were a few steps from here, he behind me—he called me—I turned around—and you will see, Schanvoch, that there could not have been any wicked purpose on his part—only insanity—pure insanity. The moment that I turned around he threw himself upon me sword in hand—and—as he plunged the weapon into my side he cried: 'Do you recognize this sword, you who forged it yourself?' I admit—I was not a little surprised—I fell under the blow—I called out to my friend Eustace: 'What ails you? Explain yourself at least. Have I offended you in aught without knowing?' But I was only speaking—to the trees—the poor crazy man had vanished—leaving his sword beside me—another evidence of insanity—the weapon—you will notice—Schanvoch—the weapon—bore on the blade the inscription: 'Marion forged this sword for his dear friend Eustace.'"

These were the last intelligible words of the good and brave soldier. He expired a few minutes later uttering incoherent words, among which these recurred with greatest frequency: "Eustace," "flee," "save yourself."

After Marion had given up the ghost, I hastened back to Mayence in order to notify Victoria of the occurrence, nor did I conceal from her that my suspicions again pointed to Tetrik as having a hand in the plot. The man, I explained, left again vacant the government of Gaul by the removal of Marion, after Victorin and his son were gotten out of the way. Although desolate by the death of Marion, my foster-

sister combated my suspicions with regard to Tetrik. She reminded me that I myself, more than two months before the murder of Marion, was so struck by the expression of hatred and envy betrayed by the face and words of the captain's old companion, that I said to her before Tetrik that Marion must be very much blinded by his affection to fail to perceive that his friend was devoured by implacable jealousy. Victoria shared the opinion of the good Marion, that the crime to which he had fallen a victim had no other cause than the envious hatred of Eustace, who was driven to the point of insanity by the more recent elevation of his friend. Besides, a singular coincidence, on that same day my foster-sister received from Tetrik, then on his way to Italy, a letter in which he informed her that seeing his health was daily declining, the physicians saw but one chance of safety for him—a trip to some southern country. For that reason he was on the way to Rome with his son.

These facts, Tetrik's conduct since the death of Victorin, the touching letters that he wrote, together with what seemed to be the irrefutable arguments advanced by Victoria, once more overthrew my mistrust toward the Governor of Gascony. I also arrived at the conclusion, which was certainly justified on the face of the events, that, in view of the previous behavior of Eustace, the atrocious murder committed by him had no other motive than a savage jealousy, that was driven to the point of insanity by the recent distinction that fell to the lot of his friend.

I kept the promise that I made to the good and brave Marion at the hour of his death. His assassination was attributed to some unknown murderer, but not to Eustace. I took

the man's sword with me to Victoria; no suspicion was drawn to the actual felon, who was never more seen either at Mayence, or in the camp. Marion's remains, wept over by the whole army, received the pompous military honors due to a general and a Chief of Gaul.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TRAITOR UNMASKED.

The direst day of my life since that on which I accompanied the remains of Victorin, his son and my beloved wife Ellen to the funeral pyre that was to consume them, was the day on which the following events took place. They happened, my son, two hundred and sixty years after our ancestress Genevieve saw the young man of Nazareth die upon the cross, and five years after the assassination of Marion, the successor of Victorin in the government of Gaul.

Victoria no longer lived in Mayence, but in Treves, a large and magnificent Gallic city situated on this side of the Rhine. I continued to live with my foster-sister. Sampso, who served you as a mother since the death of my never-to-be-forgotten Ellen, Sampso became my second wife. On the evening of our marriage she admitted to me a fact of which I never had any doubt—that having always felt a secret inclination for me, she had decided never to marry, and to share her life with Ellen, you, my child, and myself.

My wife's death; the affection and profound esteem that Sampso inspired in me; her virtues; the kindnesses that she heaped upon you; the love with which you reciprocated her tenderness towards you—you loved her as a mother, whose place she worthily filled; the requirements of your education; finally also the urgent requests of Victoria, who valu-

ing the qualities of Sampso, warmly urged the union;—all these circumstances combined to induce me to propose marriage to your aunt. She accepted. But for the distressing recollections of the death of Victorin and Ellen, of whom not a day passed but we spoke with tears in our eyes; but for the incurable grief of Victoria, whose mind ever turned upon her son and grandson;—but for these circumstances I would, after so many misfortunes, have re-embraced happiness when I embraced Sampso as my wife.

Accordingly, I shared Victoria's house in the city of Treves. The sun had just risen; I was engaged with some writing for the Mother of the Camps, seeing that I continued my offices near her. Her confidential servant, called Mora, stepped into the room. The girl claimed to have been born in Mauritania, whence her name of Mora. Like the inhabitants of that region, her complexion was bronzed, almost black, like a Negro's. Nevertheless, despite the somber hue of her face, she was handsome and young. Since the four years (remember the date, my son), since the four years that Mora served my foster-sister, she gained her mistress's affection by her zeal, her reserve and her devotion that seemed proof against all temptation to change her quarters. Occasionally, seeking some diversion from her sorrows, Victoria would ask Mora to sing, because the girl's voice was of remarkable sweetness and sadness. One of the officers of the army who had been as far as the Danube, said to us one day as he heard Mora sing, that he had heard those peculiar songs in the mountains of Bohemia. Mora seemed startled, and said that she learned the songs she was singing as a little child in the country of Mauritania.

"Schanvoch," said Mora to me, "my mistress wishes to speak to you."

"I shall follow you, Mora."

"But before you go, one word, I beg you."

"Speak—what is it?"

"You are the friend, the foster-brother of my mistress—what affects her affects you—"

"Undoubtedly—what are you driving at?"

"You left my mistress last night after having spent the evening with her, your wife and son—"

"Yes—and Victoria withdrew to her room, as usual."

"Now listen—a short time after your departure, I took to her room a man wrapped in a cloak. After a conversation with the unknown man, that lasted deep into the night, instead of going to bed, my mistress was so agitated that she walked up and down the room until morning."

"Who can that man be?" I asked myself aloud, yielding to my astonishment. Victoria was not in the habit of keeping any secrets from me. "What mystery is this?"

Mora believed that I questioned her, an act of indiscretion on my part that I would have carefully guarded against, out of respect for Victoria. The girl answered:

"After your departure, Schanvoch, my mistress said to me: 'Go out by the garden gate. Wait at the little door. You will soon hear a rap. A man in a cloak will present himself—bring him to me—and not a word upon this to anyone whatever—'"

"You should, then, have abstained from making the confidence to me."

"Perhaps I am wrong in not keeping the secret, even from you, Schanvoch, the devoted friend and brother of my mis-

tress. But she seemed to me so agitated after the departure of the mysterious personage, that I thought it my duty to tell you all. There is another reason why I decided to speak to you. I led the man back to the garden gate—I walked a few steps ahead of him—he seemed to be in a towering rage, and he dropped terrible threats against my mistress. It was this that determined me to reveal to you the secret of the interview."

"Did you notify Victoria of the threats made against her?"

"No—I was hardly back to her when she brusquely—she who is otherwise so gentle towards me—ordered me to leave the room. I withdrew to a contiguous apartment, and from there I could hear my mistress walk the room all night in great agitation until dawn when she finally threw herself upon her couch. A minute ago she called me in and ordered me to bring you to her. Oh! If you had seen her! She looked so pale and somber! I thought it best to reveal to you all that had happened—"

I hastened to Victoria in a state of great alarm. The sight of her struck me painfully. Mora had not exaggerated.

Before proceeding with the thread of this narrative, and to the end of helping you to understand it, my son, I must give you some details upon the special arrangement of Victoria's chamber. In the rear of the spacious apartment was a species of niche covered with heavy curtains. In that niche, whither my foster-sister frequently retired in order to think of those whom she had loved so much, hung the casques and swords of her father, her husband and her son Victorin, over the symbols of our druid faith. In the niche also stood—a dear and precious relic—the cradle of the grandson of this woman, whom misfortune had so sorely tried.

Victoria stepped towards me, reached out her hand, and said in a faltering voice:

"Brother, for the first time in my life I have kept a secret from you; brother, for the first time in my life I am about to resort to ruse and dissimulation."

She then took me by the hand, led me to the niche, drew back the heavy curtain that closed it from sight, and added:

"Every minute is precious; step into that niche; remain there silent, motionless, and lose not a word of all that you shall hear. I hide you in time in order to remove suspicion."

The curtains of the niche closed upon me; I remained in the dark; for a while I heard only Victoria's steps over the floor as she walked the room in evident agitation. I was in my hiding place for over half an hour when I heard the door of Victoria's room open and close. Someone stepped in and said:

"Greeting to Victoria the Great!"

It was Tetrik's voice, the same mellifluous and insinuating voice. The following conversation took place between him and Victoria. As she recommended to me, I engraved every word in my memory, and that same day I transcribed them, realizing the gravity of the dialogue. Another circumstance which I shall presently inform you of dictated the precaution to me.

"Greeting to Victoria the Great," said the former Governor of Gascony.

"Greeting to you, Tetrik."

"Did the night bring counsel, Victoria?"

"Tetrik," answered Victoria in a perfectly calm voice that was in strong contrast with the agitation under which I had just seen her laboring, "Tetrik, you are a poet?"

"It is true—I sometimes seek in the cultivation of letters a little recreation from the cares of state—especially from my undying sorrow over the untimely departure of our glorious Victorin, whom, contrary to my expectations, I have survived. I must repeat it to you, Victoria, let us not speak of that young hero, whom I loved with the deep love of a father. I had two sons; I have only one left to me.—I am a poet, say you? Alas! Fain would I be one of those geniuses who render immortal the heroes of their songs—Victorin would then live in all posterity as he lives in the hearts of those who knew and mourn for him! But why do you broach the subject of verses? Have they any connection with the subject that brings me back to you this morning?"

"Like all poets—you surely read your verses many times over in order to correct them—and then you forget them, if the term can be used, to the end that when you read them over anew, you may be struck all the more forcibly by anything that may hurt your eyes or ears."

"Certes, after having written some ode under the inspiration of the moment, it has sometimes happened to me that, as the saying is, I let my verses sleep for several months, and then, reading them over again, was shocked at things that had at first escaped me. But poetry is not the question before us."

"There is, indeed, a great advantage in first letting thoughts sleep and then taking them up again," answered my foster-sister with a phlegma that surprised me more and more. "Yes, the method is a good one. That which, under the heat of inspiration may not have at first wounded us—sometimes shocks our senses when the inspiration has cooled down. If the test is useful in the instance of frivolous matters like

verses, should it not be all the more useful when grave matters affecting our lives are concerned?"

"Victoria, I do not grasp your meaning!"

"I yesterday received from you a letter that ran thus: 'This evening I shall be in Treves unknown to anybody. I conjure you, in the name of the most vital interests of our beloved country, to receive me in secrecy, and not to mention the matter to anyone, not even to your friend Schanvoch. Towards midnight I shall await your answer. I shall be found wrapped in my cloak near your garden gate.'"

"And you granted me the interview, Victoria. Unfortunately for me it led to no decisive results, and so, instead of my returning to Mayence, as I should have done, I find myself compelled to remain at Treves, seeing you demanded time until this morning to arrive at a conclusion."

"I shall be unable to arrive at any conclusion before submitting your proposition to the test that we just spoke of. Tetrik, I let your offers sleep, or rather I slept with them. Repeat to me, now, what you said to me last night. Mayhap what wounded me then may no longer seem so objectionable—"

"Victoria, can you joke at such a moment?"

"She who, even before having had to weep over her father and her husband, over her son and her grandson, rarely laughed—such a woman will assuredly not choose the hour of eternal mourning to indulge in jokes. Believe me, Tetrik, I repeat it, your last night's propositions seemed so extraordinary to me, they have thrown my mind into such perplexity, they have raised such strange thoughts, that instead of uttering myself under the shock of my first impressions, I

prefer to forget all that we said, and to listen to you once more, as if you broached those matters for the first time."

"Victoria, your eminent intellect, your powerful mind that has always been prompt and unerring in taking a decision, did not, I must confess, prepare me for such caution and hesitation."

"Simply because never before in my life, now a long one, have I been called upon to utter myself upon questions of such moment."

"Pray, remember that yesterday—"

"I wish to remember nothing. To me our last night's interview is as if it had not been. Consider that it is now midnight, Mora has just let you in by the garden gate, and has brought you to me. Speak—I listen."

"Victoria—what is it that you have in mind?"

"Be careful—if you refuse to broach the matter in full, I might give you the answer that my first impressions dictated—and you know, Tetrik, that when I once utter myself, I do so irrevocably."

"Your first impression is, accordingly, unfavorable," cried Tetrik in an accent of anguish. "Oh! It would be a misfortune, a great misfortune!"

"Speak, then, if it is your desire to avert the misfortune."

"Be it as you desire, Victoria, although such singular conduct on your part disturbs me. You desire it? I shall satisfy you—our last night's interview did not take place—I see you now for the first time after a rather long absence, although a frequent exchange of correspondence kept us in close touch with each other, and I say to you: It is now five years ago since, struck at my very heart by the death of Victorin—a fatal event, that carried away the hopes I enter-

tained for the glory of Gaul—I lay almost dying in Italy, at Rome, whither my son accompanied me. According to the opinion of the physicians, the trip was to restore my health. They erred. My ailments increased. It pleased God that a Christian priest, whom a recently converted friend secretly introduced into my house, succeeded in reaching my bedside. The faith enlightened me—and, while enlightening me, performed a miracle—it saved me from death. I returned, so to speak, to a new life with a new religion. My son abjured, as I did, only in secret, the false gods that we had until then adored. At that stage I received a letter from you, Victoria. You informed me of the assassination of Marion. Guided by you, and as I had expected, he had governed Gaul wisely. I remained overwhelmed by such tidings; they were as distressing as they were unexpected. You conjured me in the name of the most sacred interests of our country to return to Gaul. None, you said to me, was capable of replacing Marion except myself. You even went further. I alone, in the new and peaceful era that opened to our country, could promote her prosperity by taking the reins of government. You made a vehement appeal to my old friendship for you, to my devotion for our country. I left Rome with my son. A month later I was near you at Mayence. You pledged me your far-reaching influence with the army—you were what you still are, the Mother of the Camps. Presented by you to the army I was acclaimed by it. Yes, thanks to you alone, I, a civil governor, who in my life had never touched a sword, I was acclaimed the sole Chief of Gaul, and you boldly and proudly declared on that day to the Emperor that Gaul, strong and feared, and henceforth independent, would render obedience only to a Gallic chief, freely elected. Engaged at

the time in his disastrous war in the Orient against Queen Zenobia, your heroic peer, the Emperor yielded. I alone governed our country. Ruper, an old and tried general in the wars of the Rhine, was placed in command of the troops. In its undying idolatry for you, the army wished to keep you in its midst. I was engaged in developing in Gaul the blessings of peace. Always faithful to the Christian faith, I did not consider it politic to make a public confession of my belief, and I concealed from even you, Victoria, my conversion to a religion whose Pope is in Rome. Since the last five years Gaul has been prospering at home, and is respected abroad. I established the seat of my government and of the senate at Bordeaux, while you remained with the army, which covers our frontier, and is ever ready to repel either new invasions attempted by the Franks, or any attack undertaken by the Romans, should the latter attempt to curtail the complete independence that we enjoy and conquered so dearly. As you know, Victoria, I always sought inspiration from your eminent wisdom, either by visiting you in Treves, after you left Mayence, or through correspondence with you upon the affairs of the country. But I indulge in no delusions, Victoria; I am proud to admit the truth; it was only your powerful hand that raised me to headship; it is only your hand that keeps me there. Yes, from the seclusion of her modest retreat in Treves, the Mother of the Camps is in fact the Empress of Gaul—despite the power that I enjoy, I am only your first subject. That rapid glance over the past was necessary in order to clearly formulate the present—"

"Proceed, Tetrik, I am listening attentively."

"The deplorable death of Victorin and his son, the assassination of Marion, all these catastrophes tell you upon how

slender a thread elective sovereignty hangs. Gaul is at peace; her brave army is more devoted to you than it has ever been to any of its generals; it overawes our enemies; all that our beautiful country now stands in need of, in order to reach the highest pinnacle of prosperity, is stability. The country needs an authority that will not be dependent upon the caprice of an election, which, however intelligent to-day, may be stupid to-morrow. We need a government that is not personified in a man, ever at the mercy of those who elected him, or of the dagger of an assassin. The monarchic institution, based as it is, not upon a man, but upon a principle, existed in Gaul centuries ago. It alone could to-day impart to the nation the vigor and prosperity that it lacks. Victoria, you dispose of the army, I govern the country. Let us join our strength for a common aim—the insurance of our glorious country's future; let us join, not our bodies—I am old, while you are still handsome and young, Victoria—but our souls before a priest of the new religion. Embrace Christianity, become my wife before God—and proclaim us, yourself Empress, me Emperor of the Gauls. The army will have but one voice in favor of elevating you upon a throne—you will reign alone and without sharing your power with anyone. As to me, you know it, I have no ambition to subserve. Despite my idle title of Emperor, I shall continue to be your first vassal. As to my son, we shall adopt him for our successor to the throne. He is of marriageable age; we shall choose for him some sovereign alliance—and the monarchy of Gaul will be established for all time. That, Victoria, was the proposal that I made to you last night—I repeat it to-day. I have again laid my projects bare before you and in the interest of our country. Adopt the plan; it is the

fruit of long years of meditation—and Gaul will march at the head of the nations of the world."

A long silence on the part of my foster-sister followed these words of her relative. She then replied with the calmness that marked her words since the entrance of Tetrik into the room:

"It was a wise inspiration that caused me to wish to hear you a second time, Tetrik. You abjured in favor of the new religion the ancient religion of our fathers; but almost all Gaul is still loyal to the druid faith."

"Hence it is that I considered it politic to keep my abjuration a secret, and in this I have acted in accord with the views of the Pope of Rome. But if you should accept my offer, and should yourself abjure your idolatry at our marriage, I shall then loudly proclaim my new belief, and, according to the opinion of the bishops, our conversion will draw in its wake the conversion of our people. Moreover I have the promise of the bishops that they will glorify you as a saint with all the magnificent pomp of the new Church. And, believe me, Victoria, a power that is consecrated in the name of God by the Gallic prelates and by the Pope of Rome, will be clothed in the eyes of the people with almost divine authority."

"Tell me, Tetrik; you abjured the belief of our fathers in favor of the new, in favor of the gospel preached by the young man of Nazareth who was crucified two centuries ago. I have read that gospel. An ancestress of Schanvoch's witnessed the last days of Jesus, the friend of the slave and the afflicted. Now, then, nowhere have I found in the gentle and divine words of the young master of Nazareth aught but exhortations to renounce wealth, to meekness, to equality

among men—and here are you, a fervent and recent convert, dreaming of royalty! The young man of Nazareth, so sweet, so tender of the sufferers, the sinners and the oppressed as he was, nevertheless broke out at times into terrible threats against the rich, the powerful, the worldly happy—above all and always he thundered against the princes of the church whom he branded as infamous hypocrites—and, here are you, a fervent and recent convert, seeking to place the royalty that you are striving after under the consecration of just such princes of the church, the bishops! The young man of Nazareth said to his disciples: 'When you pray, enter into your closet, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father which is in secret, and your Father which sees in secret will reward you openly'—and here are you, a fervent and recent convert, proposing to me to render our abjuration and prayers in public, pompously and solemnly, seeing that the bishops are to glorify my conversion in the face of the world. Truly, my feeble intellect, still closed to the light of the new faith, is unable to reconcile such shocking contradictions."

"Nothing more simple. The gospel of our Lord—"

"Of what 'Lord' do you speak, Tetrik?"

"Of our Lord Jesus Christ, the son of God, or rather the incarnate God."

"How the times have changed! During his life the young man of Nazareth did not call himself 'Lord'—far from it; he called himself the son of God, in the sense that our druid faith teaches us that we are all children of the same God. And in line with the teachings of our druids he declared that our spirit, emancipated of its terrestrial bonds, proceeds to unknown worlds where it animates rejuvenated bodies."

"The times have changed—you are right, Victoria. Taken in an absolute sense, the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ would be but a weapon of eternal rebellion in the hands of the poor against the rich, the servant against his lord, the people against their chiefs—it would be the negation of all authority. Creeds on the contrary have the mission to strengthen authority."

"I am aware of that. In the days of their primitive barbarism, and before they became the sublimest of men, our druids rendered themselves redoubtable to the ignorant, struck them with terror, and crushed them under their yoke. But the young man of Nazareth smote the atrocious knavery when he indignantly denounced the princes of the church saying: 'They bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.' All the more, if he is God, should his words be held sacred. You speak, Tetrik, very much after the fashion of the Pharisees of old, who caused the young man of Nazareth to be crucified."

"Those are only sentimental views. Cultured minds, like yours, will understand the true meaning of those bitter criticisms, and the violent attacks of our Lord against the rich, the powerful and the priests of his days. His sermons in favor of community of property, his exaggerated mercifulness towards women of ill fame, the debauched, the prodigals, the vagabonds—in short, his preference for the dregs of the population with which he surrounded himself are not the means of government and authority. The priests and bishops of the new faith alone are able, by means of their sermons, skilfully to turn off the dangerous current of the thought of equality among men, of hatred against the mighty, of dis-

possessment against the rich, of liberty, of fraternity, of community of goods, of tolerance for the guilty—a fatal current that takes its source in certain passages of the gospel, which vulgar minds wrongfully interpret."

"And yet it is in the name of those generous thoughts that so many martyrs have died in the past, and are still sacrificing their lives!"

"Alas, yes! Jesus our Lord has remained for them the carpenter of Nazareth, who was put to death for having defended the poor, the slaves, the oppressed, the sinners, against those who then enjoyed power; he promised the former the goods of the latter saying that the day would come when 'the first would be the last.' It is for that reason that these martyrs preach with unconquerable heroism the doctrines of Jesus, the friend of the poor, the enemy of the mighty. The interests of both the present and the future, accordingly, dictate to you that you accept my offer. I resume: Take me for your husband; embrace the new faith, as I did; have yourself and me proclaimed Emperor and Empress; adopt my son and his posterity. All Gaul will follow our example and become Christians; we shall heap privileges and wealth upon the bishops, and they will consecrate in us the most sovereign and absolute authority ever vested in any emperor or empress!"

At this point, Victoria's voice, that until then was calm and collected, broke out indignant and threatening:

"Tetrik! The compact that you are proposing to me is sacrilegious—infamous! Yesterday I thought you were demented—to-day, when you repeat your proposition and expose to my gaze, even clearer than you did before, the abysmal depths of your infernal soul, I see in you a monster of am-

bition and of felony! At this hour the past lights up the present before me, and the present lights the future! Blessed be you, Hesus! I was not alone when this plot was unrolled to my ears! You inspired me, Oh, Hesus! I wished to have a witness, who, in case of need, could verify the reality of this monstrous proposal—Victoria herself would not be believed upon her unsupported testimony when she uncovers such dark designs! Come, brother—come, Schanvoch!"

At Victoria's call I presented myself, crying:

"Sister, I no longer say as I once did: 'I suspect this man!' To-day I accuse the criminal!"

"Schanvoch!" answered Tetrik disdainfully, "your accusations are stale. This is not the first time that such silly words have dropped before my contempt—"

"I formerly only suspected you, Tetrik," I said determinedly, "of having by your machinations brought on the death of Victorin and his son, who was still in his cradle. To-day I accuse you of that horrible plot. I prefer against you the charge of murder!"

"Take care!" Tetrik answered pale, somber and with a threatening gesture. "Take care! My power is great—I can annihilate you—"

"Brother," Victoria said to me, "your thought is mine—speak without fear—I also have power."

"Tetrik," I proceeded, "I once only suspected you of being at the bottom of Marion's assassination—to-day I accuse you of that crime also!"

"Crazy wretch! Where are the proofs of the charges that you have the audacity to hurl at me?"

"Oh! You are prudent and skilful as well as patient. You break your tools in the dark after having used them—"

"Those are idle words," answered Tetrik with icy coolness. "Your proofs, where are they! I laugh at your impotent threats."

"The proofs!" cried Victoria. "They are embodied in your sacrilegious propositions. You conceived the project of being the hereditary emperor of Gaul long before Victorin's death; your proposition of having my grandson acclaimed the heir of his father's office was a lure meant at once to lead me off the scent of your designs and to furnish the first step of the ladder that you meant to climb."

"Victoria, anger is blinding you! What a bungler would I have been—if, indeed, the ambitious object that I pursued was a hereditary throne for myself—to advise you to vest the power in your own stock—"

"Aye! For one thing, the principle would have been accepted by the army. For another, once hereditary power was established for the future, you would have rid yourself of my son and grandson, in the manner that you did—by assassination. It is all now clear before me. That cursed Bohemian girl was your instrument; she was sent to Mayence in order to seduce my son, in order to drive him with her refusals to the infamous act that the creature demanded as the price of her favors. The crime once committed, my son would either be killed by Schanvoch, who was hastily called back to Mayence that very night, or he would be slain by the army, which received timely notice and was lashed to fury by your emissaries—"

"Proofs—proofs—Victoria! Proofs!"

"I have none, yet I state the facts! You managed to have my grandson killed the same night—torn from my arms. My stock is extinguished. Your first step towards empire was

marked in blood. You thereupon declined power, and proposed the elevation of Marion. Oh! I admit it! Before that prodigy of infernal cunning, my suspicions, which were for a moment aroused, melted away. Two months after his acclamation as Chief of Gaul, Marion fell under the sword of an execrable assassin, your instrument again—"

"Proofs!" broke in Tetrik impassibly. "Furnish the proofs!"

"I have none, yet I state the facts. You remained the only available candidate for the office—Victorin, his son and Marion were killed. Thereupon, I unwittingly became your accomplice. I urged you to accept the government of the country. You triumphed, but only in part; you governed; but, you said it, you were but the first subject of the Mother of the Camps. Oh! I perceive it clearly! The hour has come when my power stands in your way. The army, Gaul, accepted Tetrik for their chief upon my request. It was not they who chose you. With one word I can break you, the same as I raised you to the place that you now are in. Blinded by ambition you judged my heart after your own; you thought me capable of wishing to exchange my influence over the army for the crown of an empress, and of enthroning my stock. You have entered into a dark compact with the Pope and bishops, looking to the eventual brutification and enslavement of this proud Gallic people which freely chooses its chiefs, and remains faithful to the religion of our fathers. Why, centuries ago this people broke the yoke of kingship through the sacred hands of Ritha-Gaur, and yet you now scheme to impose upon it a hated domination by allying yourself with the new Church! Very well, I, Victoria, the Mother of the Camps, accuse you before the people in arms of in-

triguing for the subjugation of Gaul! I accuse you of having denied the faith of our fathers! I accuse you of entering into a secret alliance with the bishops! I accuse you of wishing to usurp the imperial crown and to render it hereditary in your family! I shall bring these charges against you before the people in arms, and shall pronounce you a traitor, a renegade, a murderer, a usurper! I shall demand on the spot that you be tried by the senate, and punished with death for your crimes!"

The vehemence of the accusations of my foster-sister notwithstanding, Tetrik maintained his habitual composure. For a moment he had dropped the mask and flown at me with threats. Now he was himself again. Raising his hands heavenward, he answered with the most unctuous voice that he could summon:

"Victoria, I considered the project that I submitted to you advantageous to Gaul—let us drop it. You accuse me; I am ready to answer for my acts before the senate and the army. Should my death, decreed at your instigation, be of any service to my country, I shall not refuse to you the few days of life that are still left to me. I shall await the decision of the senate. Adieu, Victoria. The future will tell which of us two, you or I, understood the country's interests better, and loved Gaul with the wiser love."

Saying this he took a step toward the door. I dashed forward ahead of him, barred his passage and said:

"You shall not go out! You mean to flee from the punishment that is due to your crimes—"

Tetrik looked me from head to feet with icy haughtiness, and half turning towards Victoria, said:

"What! In your house, violence is attempted upon an old man! Upon a relative who comes to you unsuspecting—"

"I shall respect that which is considered sacred in all countries—hospitality," answered the Mother of the Camps. "You came to me freely, you shall go out freely."

"Sister!" I cried. "Be careful! Your confidence has proved fatal once before—"

Victoria interrupted me with a gesture, and said bitterly:

"You are right—my confidence has been fatal to the country; it weighs upon my heart with remorse—but fear not this time."

Saying this she rang the bell. Mora entered almost immediately. Her mistress whispered a few words in her ear and the servant quickly went out again.

"Tetrik," Victoria proceeded, "I have sent for Captain Paul and several officers. They will come here for you. They will accompany you to your lodging—you shall not leave the place but to appear before your judges."

"My judges! Who are to be my judges?"

"The army will appoint a tribunal—that tribunal will judge you."

"I can be tried only by the senate."

"If the military tribunal finds you guilty, you will then be sent before the senate; if the military tribunal acquits you, you will be free. Only divine vengeance will then be able to reach you."

Mora re-entered the room to inform her mistress that her orders were issued to Captain Paul. Afterwards I remembered, but, alas! too late, that Mora exchanged a few words in a low voice with Tetrik who sat near the door.

"Schanvoch," Victoria said to me, "did you hear well the conversation that I had with Tetrik?"

"Perfectly. I lost not one word."

"Transcribe it faithfully."

And turning to the Chief of Gaul she said:

"That will be the indictment that I shall bring against you. It shall be read before the military tribunal that is to sit in judgment upon you."

"Victoria," Tetrik replied calmly, "listen to the advice of an old man, who once was and still is your best friend. It is an easy thing to accuse a man, but to prove his crime is a more difficult affair—"

"Hold your tongue, detestable hypocrite!" cried Victoria angrily. "Drive me not to extremes—"

And clasping her hands:

"Hesus! Give me the strength to be equitable towards this man. Calm down in me, Oh, Hesus! the ebullitions of anger that might unsettle my judgment!"

Having heard steps behind the door, Mora opened it, and returned to her mistress, saying:

"Captain Paul has arrived."

Victoria made a sign to Tetrik to leave the room. He stepped out heaving a profound sigh and saying in penetrating accents:

"Lord! Lord! Dissipate the blindness of my enemies! Pardon them, as I pardon them!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE VISION OF VICTORIA.

When the room was cleared of the presence of Tetrik the Mother of the Camps said to her servant, just as the latter was about to leave close upon the heels of Tetrik:

"Mora, my breast is afire. Bring me a cup of water with some honey, to cool me and slake my thirst."

The servant hurriedly nodded her head and vanished with Tetrik, who lingered for a moment at the threshold.

"Oh, my brother!" murmured Victoria despondently when we were again alone. "My long struggle with that man has exhausted me—the sight of evil lames my energies—I feel broken—"

"Want of sleep, excitement, the horror that the sight of Tetrik inspired you with—all this has rendered you feverish. Take a little rest, sister; I shall instantly transcribe your conversation with the man. This very evening justice will be done."

"You are right; I think that if I could sleep a while I should feel relieved. Go, brother, but do not leave the house."

"Would you like Sampso to keep you company?"

"No, I prefer to be alone."

Mora re-entered. She carried a cup filled with the beverage that her mistress had ordered. The latter took the cup and drained its contents with avidity. Leaving my foster-

sister to the care of her servant, I went back to my room in order to reproduce the words of Tetrik accurately. I was just about finishing the task, which took me nearly two hours, when Mora dashed in pale and frightened.

"Schanvoch!" she cried panting for breath. "Come! Come quick! Drop your writing! Hasten to my mistress!"

"What is the matter! What has happened?"

"My mistress. Oh! Woe! Woe! Come quick!"

"Victoria! Does any danger threaten her?" I cried, hurrying to the apartment of my foster-sister, while Mora followed me, saying:

"She sent me out of the room—she wanted to be alone. A minute ago I went in—and, woe is me! I saw my poor mistress—"

"Finish speaking—you saw Victoria—"

"I saw her lying on her bed—her eyes open—but they were fixed—she seemed dead—"

I shall never forget the frightful sight that struck my eyes as I stepped into Victoria's chamber. As Mora said, she lay stretched upon her bed motionless, livid, like a corpse. Her fixed, yet sparkling eyes, seemed to have sunk into their orbits; her features, painfully contracted, were of the cold whiteness of marble. A sinister thought flashed through my mind like lightning—Victoria was dying of poison!

"Mora!" I cried throwing myself upon my knees beside the couch of the Mother of the Camps. "Send immediately for the druid physician, and run and tell Sampso to come here!"

The servant rushed out. I took one of Victoria's hands. It was limp and icy.

"Sister! It is I!" I cried—"Schanvoch!"

"Brother," she murmured.

As I heard her muffled, feeble voice, methought the answer proceeded from the bottom of a tomb. A moment later, her eyes, that until then were fixed, turned slowly towards me. The divine intelligence that formerly illumined the beautiful, august and sweet look of my foster-sister seemed extinguished. Nevertheless, by degrees, she recovered consciousness, and said:

"Is it you—brother? I am dying—"

Tossing her head painfully from one side to the other as if seeking something, she made an effort to raise her arm; it dropped immediately beside her; she then proceeded to say:

"See yonder large trunk—open it—you will find in it—a bronze casket—bring it to me—"

I did as I was bid, and deposited a rather heavy bronze casket near her on the couch. At that moment Sampso, whom Mora notified of Victoria's condition, came in.

"Sampso," said Victoria, "take this casket—take it away with you—keep it carefully locked—open it in three days—the key is tied to the lid."

And addressing me:

"Did you transcribe Tetrik's conversation with me?"

"I was just finishing it when Mora ran in to me."

"Sampso, take that casket away to your room immediately, and bring me the parchment on which Schanvoch has just been writing. Go, we have not a minute to spare!"

Sampso obeyed and left the room distracted. I remained alone with Victoria.

"Brother," she said to me, "every minute is precious. Listen to what I have to say to you without interrupting me. I feel that I am dying; I think I know the hand that smote me, without her being herself aware of what she was doing. This crime caps a long series of dark and felonious deeds. My death is at this moment a grave danger to Gaul. We must avert the danger. You are known in the army—my confidence in you is known—call the officers and soldiers together—inform them of Tetrik's schemes. The conversation that you transcribed will be signed by me, in order to verify your words. My life is ebbing fast. Oh! If I but had the time to gather here around my deathbed the officers of the army who this very evening will surround my funeral pyre. Upon that pyre I wish you to lay the arms of my father, my husband and Victorin, also the cradle of my little grandson!"

"Schanvoch!" cried Sampso precipitately entering the room "The parchments that you left upon the table—have disappeared. But I saw them lying on your desk when Mora came in to call me. They must have been taken away since."

"The parchments were taken away! Oh! What a misfortune to Gaul!" murmured Victoria. "What mysterious hand is it that can thus penetrate my house? Woe, woe is Gaul! Hesus! Omnipotent god! You call me to the unknown worlds, where, perhaps, we may hover over this world that we leave for yonder ones. Hesus! Am I to leave this earth without the assurance of the welfare of the country I love so much? The future terrifies me! Oh, Omnipotent! Allow your spirit to enlighten me at this supreme moment! Hesus, have you heard me?" added Victoria in a louder voice, half rising on her couch; and with inspired eyes she pro-

ceeded: "What do I see? Is this the future that unveils itself before my eyes? Who is that woman—so pale, lying prostrate? Her robe is blood-bespattered. Also her chaplet of oaken leaves has drops of blood; the sword, that her virile hand once held, lies broken at her side. One of those savage Franks, his head ornamented with a crown, holds the noble woman under his knees; he looks with mild and timid mien at a man splendidly arrayed as a pontiff. Hesus! The bleeding woman—is Gaul! The barbarian who kneels down upon her—is a Frankish king! The pontiff—is the Bishop of Rome! Blood flows! a stream of blood! it carries in its course, to the light of the flames of conflagrations, a mass of ruins, thousands of corpses! Oh! the woman—Gaul, I see her again wan, worn, clad in rags, the iron collar of servitude on her neck; she drags herself on her knees; bending under a heavy burden! The Frankish king and the Roman bishop quicken the march of enslaved Gaul with their whips! Another torrent of blood; still the glamour of conflagration. Oh, Hesus! Enough! Enough ruins and massacre! Heaven be praised!" cried Victoria, whose face seemed for a moment to beam with divine splendor. "The noble woman has risen to her feet! Behold her—more beautiful, prouder than ever before! Her head is wreathed in a crown of fresh oak-leaves! In one hand she holds a sheaf of grain, grapes and flowers; in the other a red flag,[1] surmounted by the Gallic cock. Superbly she tramples under foot the fragments of her collar of slavery, the crown of the Frankish kings and that of the Roman pontiffs! Yes, that woman, free at last, stately, glorious and fruitful—she is Gaul! Hesus! Hesus! Be kind to her! Enable her to break the

[1] The color of the Gallic emblem was crimson red.

yoke of Kings and Pontiffs! Lead her to freedom, glorious and fruitful without being compelled to reach the goal by wading from century to century through those seas of tears, those seas of blood that affright me!"

These last words wholly exhausted Victoria's strength. Still she made one more effort in her divine exaltation. She raised her eyes to heaven, crossed her arms over her breast, heaved a long sigh, and fell back upon her couch.

The Mother of the Camps, Victoria the Great, was dead!

While she spoke I made superhuman efforts to control my despair. When, however, I saw her expire, I became dizzy, my knees sank under me, my strength, my thoughts fled. I lost consciousness, but I still recollect the sound of many voices and a great tumult in the contiguous apartment whence I heard distinctly the words:

"Tetrik, the Chief of Gaul, is in his death agony—he is dying of poison—"

CHAPTER VIII.

CRIME TRIUMPHANT.

For several days I lay at death's door, constantly attended, my son, by your second mother. About two weeks passed after the death of Victoria, before I was able to collect and co-ordinate my recollections, and speak with Sampso of our irreparable loss. The last words that struck my ears when, broken with grief, I wholly lost consciousness beside the death-bed of my foster-sister were these:

"Tetrik, the Chief of Gaul, is in his death agony—he is dying of poison."

Indeed Tetrik was, or rather seemed to have been, poisoned at the same time as Victoria. He had hardly stepped into the house of the general of the army, when he seemed seized with severe pangs. When two weeks later I myself returned to life, the life of Tetrik was still despaired of.

I must admit I was stupefied at the strange information; my reason refused to believe the man guilty of a crime of which he was himself a victim.

Victoria's death threw the city of Treves, the army, and later the whole nation into consternation. The funeral of the august Mother of the Camps seemed to be the funeral of Gaul herself. In her sudden taking-off people saw the presage of new evils to the country. The Gallic senate decreed the apotheosis of Victoria. It was celebrated at Treves in the midst

of universal sorrow and tears. The pompous solemnity of the druid cult, the chant of the bards, imparted imposing splendor to the ceremony. Embalmed and lying on an ivory couch covered with cloth of gold, Victoria lay in state to the veneration of the citizens who crowded in mass to the house of mourning. The place was constantly invaded by that army of the Rhine of which Victoria was truly the mother. Finally her remains were placed upon the pyre, agreeable to the custom of our fathers. Incense rose along the streets of Treves, crossed by the funeral procession, which was headed by the bards singing on their golden harps the praises of the illustrious woman. The pyre was then set on fire and disappeared in a sheet of flame.

A medal, struck on the very day of the funeral ceremony, represents, on its obverse, the head of the Gallic heroine, casqued as Minerva, and on its reverse, an eagle with outstretched wings flying into space with its eyes fixed upon the sun, the symbol of the druid faith—the soul leaving this world and flying towards the unknown world where it is to be clad in a new body. Under the symbol the ordinary formula was engraved: "Consecration," followed below by these words:

VICTORIA, EMPEROR.

By that virile appellation Gaul immortalized in her enthusiasm the glorious Mother of the Camps, and wreathed her memory in a title that she had steadily declined during life—a life that was at once modest and sublime, and wholly consecrated to her father, her husband, her son and to the glory and welfare of her country.

My perplexity was profound. The poisoning of Tetrik, who, as it was claimed, still struggled with death, the dis-

appearance of the parchments that contained the traitor's conversation with Victoria, and which she was thereby prevented from signing before dying—all these circumstances rendered the prosecution of the traitor difficult, if not impossible. An accusation lodged by me, an obscure soldier, against Tetrik, who survived as the supreme Chief of Gaul, and whose power was now all the greater, seeing it was no longer counterbalanced by the vast influence of the Mother of the Camps, could not lead to favorable results. Before deciding upon a final course in the matter, I waited for my shattered frame and mind to recover their former vigor.

Three days after Victoria's death, and obedient to the last wishes of the Mother of the Camps, Sampso opened the casket that Victoria gave her. In it my wife found a last touching proof of the thoughtfulness of my foster-sister. There was a parchment with these words inscribed in her own hand:

"We shall never part until death," did we, my good brother Schanvoch, often say to each other; it is your wish, it is mine; but if I am called away before you to live in the unknown worlds, where we shall one day meet again, I shall feel happy on the day when we shall meet again elsewhere than here, at the thought that you have gone back to Brittany, the cradle of your family.

The Roman conquest plundered your family of its ancestral fields. Free once more, Gaul should, in the name of right or by force, have revanquished the heritage of your children from the descendants of the Romans. I know not what will be our country's condition, at the time of our separation. But, hap what hap may, there are three means by which you will be able to revindicate your just heritage—right, money or force. You have the right, you have the force, you have the money—you will find in this casket the

sufficient sum with which to buy back, if need be, the fields that belonged to your family, and thenceforth live happy and free near the sacred stones of Karnak, the witnesses of the heroic death of your ancestress Hena, the Virgin of the Isle of Sen.

You have often shown to me the pious relics of your family—I wish to join to them a souvenir of my own. You will find in this casket a bronze lark. I wore that ornament on my casque the day of the battle of Riffenel, at which I saw my son Victorin flash his virgin sword. I wish that you and your family may continue to keep this memento of our fraternal friendship. It is left to you by your foster-sister Victoria; she is of your family—did she not drink the milk of your brave mother?

When you read these lines, my good brother Schanvoch, I shall have been re-born beyond, near those whom I have loved.

Persevere in your fidelity to Gaul and the faith of our fathers. You have approved yourself worthy of your family. May your descendants approve themselves worthy of you, and write, without having to blush, the history of their lives, as Joel, the brenn of the tribe of Karnak, has desired them to do. VICTORIA.

Need I tell you, my son, how deeply I was moved by such solicitude on her part? I was at the time steeped in gloom and absorbed by the fear of the grave events that might follow in the wake of Victoria's death. I remained almost insensible to the hope of speedily returning to Brittany, in order to end my days there, on the spot where my ancestors lived. When my health was completely restored, I repaired to the general who commanded the army of the Rhine. An old soldier himself, he was certain to appreciate better than anyone else the serious dangers that Gaul remained exposed to with Victoria's death. I frankly told him the schemes that Tetrik was hatching; I also expressed to him my sus-

picions regarding the poisoning of my foster-sister. The general made me the following answer:

"The crimes and plots that you accuse Tetrik of are so monstrous, they would bespeak so infernal a soul, that I would hardly believe them, even if they were attested by Victoria herself, our august mother, whom we can never forget. Schanvoch, you are a brave and honest soldier, but your deposition will not suffice to bring the Chief of Gaul to the bar of the senate and the army. Besides, Tetrik is himself about to die; even his own poisoning proves to a certainty that he is innocent of Victoria's death. You would be the only witness against the Chief of Gaul, who has been loved and venerated up to now, seeing that he has always conducted himself as the first subject of Victoria, the real empress of the nation. Take my advice, Schanvoch, invigorate your spirit, that the sudden death of this august woman has so severely shaken. It may be that, shocked by the disaster, your judgment is led astray, and mistakes vague apprehensions for facts. Until now, Tetrik has governed Gaul wisely, thanks to the inspiration of our august Mother. If he dies, he will be regretted by us; if he survives the mysterious crime which he has himself narrowly escaped, we shall continue to honor the man who was pointed out to us by Victoria herself as the fit object of our choice."

The general's answer proved to me that I would never succeed in causing the senate and the army to share my suspicions and convictions, both being so thoroughly prejudiced in favor of the Chief of Gaul.

Tetrik did not die. Hearing of his father's predicament, his son hurried to Treves, and took his father in charge. When he became convalescent, Tetrik held lengthy interviews

with the senators and the chiefs of the army. He manifested on the subject of Victoria's death so profound and, to all appearance, sincere a grief; he honored her memory in so pious a manner by a funeral ceremony at which he glorified the illustrious woman, whose omnipotent hand, he said, had so long supported him, and to whom he felt proud of owing his elevation; in short, he seemed so heart-stricken when, pale, worn with his illness, frequently breaking out into tears, and leaning on the arm of his son, he dragged himself with unsteady step to the sad solemnity, that he conquered the affection of the people and the army more completely than ever by the last homage that he rendered to the memory of Victoria.

I then realized how utterly futile it would be to press my accusations against Tetrik. With my heart rent at seeing the fate of Gaul in the hands of a man whom I knew for a traitor, I decided to leave Treves with you, my son, and Sampso, your second mother, and repair to Brittany, the country of our family's nativity, there to seek some consolation for my sorrows.

Nevertheless I felt bound to fulfil what I considered a sacred duty. By dint of constantly interrogating my memory on the subject of the conversation between Tetrik and Victoria, I succeeded in transcribing it a second time, word for word. Of this I made a second copy, and on the eve of my departure took the first draft to the general of the army.

"You are of the opinion," I said to him, "that my reason wanders—keep this narrative—I hope the future may not prove to you the truth of my accusation."

The general took the parchment, and dismissed me with the compassionate mien that is bestowed upon people whose mind is deranged.

CHAPTER IX.

KIDDA, THE BOHEMIAN GIRL.

On leaving the general of the army I walked home disconsolate. Crime was triumphant. I returned home, to the house of my foster-sister, where I remained until my departure for Brittany. I was engaged with Sampso packing up the last articles needed on our journey, when the following unlooked-for events happened on that night.

Mora, the servant, had also remained in the house. The woman's grief at her mistress's death touched my heart. On the night that I am writing about, my son, while engaged with your second mother in the preparations for our journey, we found that we needed another trunk. I went downstairs in search of one into a room that was separated from Mora's chamber by a rough wooden partition. It was past midnight. Upon entering the room where the trunk was, I noticed, to my no slight astonishment, that a bright light shone from the servant's room through the clefts of the partition. Fearing that the woman's bed might have taken fire while she slept, I hastened to peep through the clefts in the boards. I bounded back with astonishment, but quickly returned to my place of observation.

Mora was contemplating herself in a little silver mirror by the light of two lamps, the gleam of which had first attracted my attention. But it was no longer Mora the Mauri-

tanian; at least, her bronze complexion had disappeared! I now saw her a pale brunette, coiffed in a rich gold band ornamented with precious stones. The woman smiled at herself in the glass. She put a long pearl earring to one of her ears, and—strangest of all—she wore a corsage of some silvery material and a scarlet skirt.

I recognized Kidda, the Bohemian girl.

Alas! I had seen the creature only once, and then only by the light of the moon, on that fateful night, when, suddenly recalled to Mayence by the mysterious notification given me by my traveling companion, I slew Victorin in my house, together with my beloved wife Ellen.

Rage followed close upon the heels of my stupor—a horrible suspicion flashed through my mind. I bolted from the inside the room in which I was; with a violent thrust of my shoulder—rage multiplied my strength a hundredfold—I broke down one of the boards of the partition, and suddenly I stood before the eyes of the startled Bohemian. With one hand I seized her and threw her upon her knees, with the other I took one of the two heavy iron lamps, and raising it over the woman's head I cried:

"I shall shatter your skull if you do not immediately confess your crimes!"

Kidda believed she read the decree of her death in my face. She grew livid and murmured:

"Kill me not! I shall speak!"

"You are Kidda, the Bohemian girl?"

"Yes—I am Kidda."

"You were formerly at Mayence—and, as the price of your

favors, you exacted of Victorin that he dishonor my wife Ellen?"

"Yes—that is so!"

"You were acting under orders of Tetrik?"

"No, I never spoke to him."

"Whose orders were you, then, following?"

"Of Tetrik's equerry."

"The man is cautious," I thought to myself. "And the soldier who on that fateful night announced to me that a heinous crime was being perpetrated in my house—do you know who he was?"

"It was Captain Marion's companion in arms, he was a former blacksmith, like Marion."

"Did Tetrik also know that soldier?"

"No, it was Tetrik's equerry who had secret conferences with him at Mayence."

"And where is that soldier now?"

"He died."

"After Tetrik employed him to assassinate Captain Marion?"

The girl looked puzzled.

"Did Tetrik cause him to be put to death? Answer!"

"I think so!"

"And it is that same equerry who sent you to this house under the guise of Mora, the Mauritanian? Was it in order to disguise yourself that you painted your face?"

"Yes—that is all so."

"You were to spy upon your mistress, were you not?—and then poison her? Speak! If you believe in a God—if your infernal soul dares at this supreme moment to implore his help—you have but a minute to live—Speak!"

"Have pity upon me!"

"Confess your crime—you committed it under orders of Tetrik? Speak!"

"Yes, I was ordered by Tetrik."

"When—how did he give you the order to execute that crime?"

"When I entered the room the second time—after I was sent to bring Captain Paul, who was to arrest Tetrik."

"And the poison—you poured it into the drink that you were to present to your mistress?"

"Yes—it happened that way."

"And on that same day," I added, my recollections now thronging to my mind, "when I sent you to my wife, you purloined a parchment that lay on my table and that I had written upon?"

"Yes, Tetrik ordered me to—he heard Victoria refer to the parchment."

"Why, after the crime was committed, did you stay in this house down to to-day?"

"So as to awaken no suspicions."

"What induced you to poison your mistress?"

"The gift of these jewels that I was entertaining myself with putting on when you broke in upon me. I thought I was alone!"

"Tetrik came himself near dying of the poison—do you believe his equerry is guilty of that crime?"

"Every poison has its counter-poison," answered the Bohemian with a sinister smile. "He who poisons others, removes suspicion from himself by drinking from the same cup, and he is safe through the counter-poison."

The woman's answer was a flash-light to me. By an infernal ruse, and doubtlessly guaranteed against death, thanks

to an antidote, Tetrik had swallowed enough poison to produce in him the identical symptoms that marked Victoria's agony and thus seem to share her fate.

To seize a scarf that lay upon the bed, and, despite the resistance that she offered, to tie her hands firmly together and to lock her up in one of the lower rooms, was the affair of but an instant. I ran back to the general of the army. After finally succeeding in being admitted to his presence—a difficult thing owing to the hour of the night—I repeated to him the confession that Kidda had just made to me. He shrugged his shoulders impatiently and said:

"Ever this same, rooted, thought—your mind must be wholly deranged. The idea of having me waked up to hear such crazy man's stories. Moreover, you have chosen ill the hour to prefer such charges against the venerable Tetrik. He left Treves last evening for Bordeaux."

The departure of Tetrik was a heavy blow to my last hopes. Nevertheless, I pressed the general with such insistence, I spoke to him with such earnestness and coherence, that he consented to order one of his officers to accompany me back to the house, and take the Bohemian girl's confession in writing. He and I returned hurriedly to the house. I opened the door of the chamber in which I had left Kidda with her hands tied. She was gone! She must have gnawed at the scarf with her teeth, and fled by one of the windows that now stood open and that looked into the garden. In my hurry and the seething confusion of my brain I had omitted to guard against the chances of the woman's escape by that issue.

"Poor Schanvoch!" said the officer to me with deep pity.

"Your grief makes you see visions—be careful, or you will go crazy, altogether!"

And without caring to listen to me any longer he left.

The will of God be done! I now renounced all hope of uncovering the crimes of Tetrik. The next day I left the city of Treves with you and Sampso, and took the road for Brittany.

You will read, alas! with no little grief and apprehension, my son, the few lines with which I shall close this narrative. You will see how our old Gaul, after having fully reacquired her freedom by dint of three centuries of continuous struggle, after having become great and powerful under the influence of Victoria, was again to fall, not, it is true, completely under the yoke, but at least enfeoffed to the Roman Emperors through the infamous treachery of Tetrik.

Finding his projects of marriage and usurpation thwarted by the Mother of the Camps, the monster had her poisoned. She alone, had she consented to abjure her faith and contract a union with him, could have cleared the path for him to reach the hereditary throne of Gaul. With Victoria dead, he realized the futility of persevering along that route. Moreover, he soon felt that, being no longer sustained by the wisdom and sovereign influence of that august woman, the people's affection for him was visibly ebbing. Seeing that with every day he lost some of his former prestige, and foreseeing his speedy fall, he began to cast about for the commission of one of the two acts of treason that I had long ago suspected him of contemplating. He labored in the dark to reduce Gaul, after the country had acquired its complete independence, back to the level of a dependency of the Roman Emperors.

Long in advance, and by means of a thousand and one covert schemes, he sowed the germs of civil discord in the country. By these means Gaul's powers of resistance were weakened. He succeeded in re-kindling the old jealousies between province and province that had long been allayed. By means of deliberately practiced acts of favoritism and of injustice, he incited violent rivalries between the generals and also between the several army corps. When matters were ripe for the deed of treason he secretly wrote to Aurelian, the Roman Emperor:

"The favorable moment for an attack upon Gaul has arrived. You will prevail easily over a people that is weakened by internal dissensions, and an army, one division of which is jealous of the other. I shall notify you in advance of how the Gallic troops are distributed, and also of their moves, in order to insure the prospects of your triumph."

The two armies met on the banks of the Marne on the wide plain of Chalon. Agreeable to his promise, and acting in concert with the Roman general, Tetrik allowed the corps that he led to be cut off from the rest of the army. The Gallic legions of the Rhine fought with their wonted intrepidity, but it was of no avail. Their movements being known in advance by the enemy and overpowered by numbers, they were finally cut to pieces. Tetrik and his son took refuge in the enemy's camp. Our army being out of the way, and our country divided against itself, as it had never been before even during the darkest days of our history, victory was rendered an easy matter to the Romans. After re-enjoying absolute freedom for many a year, Gaul became a Roman province once more. As Caesar had done before him, in order to glorify the great event, the Emperor Aurelian made a solemn entry into the Roman capital. All the captives, gathered by

that emperor in the course of his long wars in Asia, marched before his chariot. Among these the queen of the Orient was seen, the heroine who emulated Victoria—Zenobia. She was loaded with golden chains riveted to the gold collar that she wore around her neck. Behind Zenobia marched Tetrik, the last Chief of Gaul before the country relapsed into a province of Rome. Tetrik and his son marched free and with heads erect, despite their infamous treachery. They wore long purple mantles over silk tunics and breeches. They represented in the procession the recent submission of the Gauls to Aurelian the Emperor.

Alas! my son, the history of our fathers will teach you that one day, three hundred years ago, another Gaul also marched before the triumphal chariot of a Roman Emperor, Caesar. That Gaul did not march in brilliant array, with audacious mien and with smiles for his vanquisher. That captive was loaded with chains, he was clad in rags, and was hardly able to walk; he was that day taken out of the dungeon where he had languished four years after having defended the freedom of Gaul inch by inch against the victorious armies of the great Caesar. That captive, one of the most heroic martyrs of our country and our independence, was called Vercingetorix, the Chief of the Hundred Valleys.

After the triumphal march of Caesar, the head of the valiant defender of Gaul was cut off.

After the triumphal march of Aurelian, Tetrik, the renegade who delivered his country to the foreigner, was led with pomp to a splendid palace, the price of his sacrilegious treason.

Let not the contrast cause you to despair of virtue, my son. The justice of Hesus is eternal. Traitors will receive their punishment.

EPILOGUE.

The narrative of my father Amael's great-grandfather Schanvoch on the events that transpired in Gaul—after the death of Victoria the Great, during the time that, living retiredly in Brittany on the fields of our ancestors that he bought back from a Roman colonist, he quietly spent his life with his son Alguen and his second wife Sampso—ends here.

While it is true that Gaul was again a province of Rome, nevertheless, all the practical franchises, that we reconquered so dearly by innumerable insurrections, and paid for with the blood of our fathers, have remained to us. None has dared, none will dare to deprive us of them. We shall preserve our laws and customs; we shall enjoy our full rights as citizens. Our incorporation with the Empire, the impost that we pay into the fisc, and our name of "Roman Gaul"—these are the only evidences of our dependence. Such a chain may not be heavy; but, light as it be, a chain it is. I doubt not that some day we shall be able to break it. The apprehensions that weighed upon my great-great-grandfather Schanvoch's mind and that continue to weigh upon mine do not arise from that quarter. No! The dangers that we apprehend—if faith is to be attached to the prediction made by Victoria upon her death-bed; the danger, that has filled us with dread for the future, rises from the once more swelling number of the Frankish hordes on the other side of the

Rhine, and in the dark machinations of the bishops of the new religion.

My great-great-grandfather Schanvoch died peaceably in our house, situated near the sacred stones of Karnak. He left the narrative that he wrote, and the casque's lark, given him by Victoria, together with the previous narratives of our family and the relics that accompany them, to his son Alguen. After a long and peaceful life Alguen died, three hundred and forty years after our ancestress Genevieve saw Jesus of Nazareth perish on the cross. Alguen's son Roderik, my grandfather, inherited from his father both our family records and relics, and a quiet, peaceful and contented life, all of which he bequeathed to his son, my father Amael, who in turn bequeathed them to me, Gildas.

I then, Gildas, make this entry to-day in our family annals three hundred and seventy-five years after the death of Jesus. I feel sad on this occasion. My father had intended to add a few words to our family annals. He postponed doing so from day to day, seeing there was nothing that he desired to make particular mention of to our descendants, his life being the uneventful one of a quiet, industrious and obscure husbandman. Two days ago my father died. He died in our own house, near the stones of Karnak, after a short illness.

The frightful predictions of Victoria, the illustrious foster-sister of my ancestor Schanvoch, have not been verified. May they never be! Gaul continues a dependence of the Roman Emperors. Occasionally a traveler reaches these parts, penetrating into these remote regions of our old Armorica. From them we have learned that, in some of the other provinces there have been several popular uprisings of considerable

strength and generally called "Bagaudies." These uprisings must have taken place shortly after the death of my ancestor Schanvoch. Brittany has remained free from the revolts of the "Bagauders." The region enjoys profound tranquility. The impost that we pay into the emperor's fisc is not too heavy. We live peacefully and free.

Several of our ancestors, during the darksome days of their enslavement to Rome, and when they were steeped in ignorance and misery, recorded on our family parchments that such was the leaden uniformity of their days, spent by them from dawn to dusk, in oppressive labors, that they had nothing to say except: "I was born, I have lived and I shall die in the sorrows of slavery." May it please the gods that the happiness of the generations that are to follow me be in turn, so uniform, that each of my descendants may, as I do now, have nothing to add to our family chronicles but these lines with which I shall close my narrative:

"I have lived happy, peaceful and obscure in our Armorican Brittany cultivating our ancestral fields with the help of my family. I shall depart from this world without fear or regret when it will please Hesus to call me away to live again in yonder unknown worlds."

I am now aged eighteen years. The family relics in my possession consist of Hena's gold sickle, Guilhern's little brass bell, Sylvest's iron collar, Genevieve's silver cross, and the casque's lark of Schanvoch.

THE END.

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